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## I. BILL'S PAPER CHASE

SAILORMEN 'ave their faults, said the night-watchman, frankly. I'm not denying of it. I used to 'ave myself when I was at sea, but being close with their money is a fault as can seldom be brought ag'in 'em.

I saved some money once—two golden sovereigns, owing to a 'ole in my pocket. Before I got another ship I slept two nights on a doorstep and 'ad nothing to eat, and I found them two sovereigns in the lining o' my coat when I was over two thousand miles away from the nearest pub.

I on'y knew one miser all the years I was at sea. Thomas Geary 'is name was, and we was shipmates aboard the barque *Grenada*, homeward bound from Sydney to London.

Thomas was a man that was getting into years ; sixty, I think 'e was, and old enough to know better. 'E'd been saving 'ard for over forty years, and as near as we could make out 'e was worth a matter of six 'undered pounds. He used to be fond o' talking about it, and letting us know how much better off 'e was than any of the rest of us.

We was about a month out from Sydney

when old Thomas took sick. Bill Hicks said that it was owing to a ha'penny he couldn't account for ; but Walter Jones, whose family was always ill, and thought 'e knew a lot about it, said that 'e knew wot it was, but 'e couldn't remember the name of it, and that when we got to London and Thomas saw a doctor, we should see as 'ow 'e was right.

Whatever it was the old man got worse and worse. The skipper came down and gave 'im some physic and looked at 'is tongue, and then 'e looked at our tongues to see wot the difference was. Then 'e left the cook in charge of 'im and went off.

The next day Thomas was worse, and it was soon clear to everybody but 'im that 'e was slipping 'is cable. He wouldn't believe it at first, though the cook told 'im, Bill Hicks told him, and Walter Jones 'ad a grandfather that went off in just the same way.

' I'm not going to die,' says Thomas. ' How can I die and leave all that money ? '

' It'll be good for your relations, Thomas,' says Walter Jones.

' I ain't got any,' says the old man.

' Well, your friends, then, Thomas,' says Walter, soft-like.

' Ain't got any,' says the old man ag'in.

' Yes, you 'ave, Thomas,' says Walter, with

a kind smile ; ' I could tell you one you've got.'

Thomas shut his eyes at 'im and began to talk pitiful about 'is money and the 'ard work 'e'd 'ad saving of it. And by-and-by 'e got worse, and didn't reckernize us, but thought we was a pack o' greedy, drunken sailormen. He thought Walter Jones was a shark, and told 'im so, and, try all 'e could, Walter couldn't persuade 'im different.

He died the day arter. In the morning 'e was whimpering about 'is money ag'in, and angry with Bill when 'e reminded 'im that 'e couldn't take it with 'im, and 'e made Bill promise that 'e should be buried just as 'e was. Bill tucked him up arter that, and when 'e felt a canvas belt tied round the old man's waist 'e began to see wot 'e was driving at.

The weather was dirty that day and there was a bit o' sea running, consequently all 'ands was on deck, and a boy about sixteen wot used to 'elp the steward down aft was lookin' arter Thomas. Me and Bill just run down to give a look at the old man in time.

' I *am* going to take it with me, Bill,' says the old man.

' That's right,' says Bill.

' My mind's—easy now,' says Thomas. ' I

gave it to Jimmy—to—to—throw overboard for me.'

'*Wot?*' says Bill, staring.

'That's right, Bill,' says the boy. 'He told me to. It was a little packet o' bank-notes. He gave me tuppence for doing it.'

Old Thomas seemed to be listening. 'Is eyes was open, and 'e looked artful at Bill to think what a clever thing 'e'd done.

'Nobody's goin'—to spend—*my* money,' 'e says. 'Nobody's——'

We drew back from 'is bunk and stood staring at 'im. Then Bill turned to the boy.

'Go and tell the skipper 'e's gone,' 'e says, 'and mind, for your own sake, don't tell the skipper or anybody else that you've thrown all that money overboard.'

'Why not?' says Jimmy.

'Becos you'll be locked up for it,' says Bill; 'you'd no business to do it. You've been and broke the law. It ought to ha' been left to somebody.'

Jimmy looked scared, and arter 'e was gone I turned to Bill, and I looks at 'im and I says: 'What's the little game, Bill?'

'*Game?*' said Bill, snorting at me. 'I don't want the pore boy to get into trouble, do I? Pore little chap. You was young yourself once.'

## BILL'S PAPER CHASE

‘ Yes,’ I says ; ‘ but I’m a bit older now, Bill, and unless you tell me what your little game is, I shall tell the skipper myself, and the chaps too. Pore old Thomas told ’im to do it, so where’s the boy to blame ? ’

‘ Do you think Jimmy *did* ? ’ says Bill, screw-up his nose at me. ‘ That little varmint is walking about worth six ’undered quid. Now you keep your mouth shut and I’ll make it worth your while.’

Then I see Bill’s game. ‘ All right, I’ll keep quiet for the sake of my half,’ I says, looking at ’im.

I thought he’d ha’ choked, and the langwidge ’e see fit to use was a’most as much as I could answer.

‘ Very well, then,’ ’e says, at last, ‘ halves it is. It ain’t robbery becos it belongs to nobody, and it ain’t the boy’s becos ’e was told to throw it overboard.’

They buried pore old Thomas next morning, and arter it was all over Bill put ’is ’and on the boy’s shoulder as they walked for’ard and ’e says, ‘ Poor old Thomas ’as gone to look for ’is money,’ he says ; ‘ wonder whether ’e’ll find it ! Was it a big bundle, Jimmy ? ’

‘ No,’ says the boy, shaking ’is ’ead. ‘ They was six ’undered pound notes and two sovereigns, and I wrapped the sovereigns up in the

notes to make 'em sink. Fancy throwing money away like that, Bill : seems a sin, don't it ? '

Bill didn't answer 'im, and that arternoon the other chaps below being asleep we searched 'is bunk through and through without any luck, and at last Bill sat down and swore 'e must ha' got it about 'im.

We waited till night, and when everybody was snoring 'ard we went over to the boy's bunk and went all through 'is pockets and felt the linings, and then we went back to our side and Bill said wot 'e thought about Jimmy in whispers.

' He must ha' got it tied round 'is waist next to 'is skin, like Thomas 'ad,' I says.

We stood there in the dark whispering, and then Bill couldn't stand it any longer, and 'e went over on tiptoe to the bunk ag'in. He was tremblin' with excitement and I wasn't much better, when all of a sudden the cook sat up in 'is bunk with a dreadful laughing scream and called out that somebody was ticklin' 'im.

I got into my bunk and Bill got into 'is, and we lay there listening while the cook, who was a terrible ticklish man, leaned out of 'is bunk and said wot 'e'd do if it 'appened ag'in.

' Go to sleep,' says Walter Jones ; ' you're

dreamin'. Who d'you think would want to tickle you ? '

' I tell you,' says the cook, ' somebody come over and tickled me with a 'and the size of a leg o' mutton. I feel creepy all over.'

Bill gave it up for that night, but the next day 'e pretended to think Jimmy was gettin' fat an' 'e caught 'old of 'im and prodded 'im all over. He thought 'e felt something round 'is waist, but 'e couldn't be sure, and Jimmy made such a noise that the other chaps interfered and told Bill to leave 'im alone.

For a whole week we tried to find that money, and couldn't, and Bill said it was a suspicious thing that Jimmy kept aft a good deal more than 'e used to, and 'e got an idea that the boy might ha' 'idden it somewhere there. At the end of that time, 'owever, owing to our being short-'anded, Jimmy was sent for'ard to work as ordinary seaman, and it began to be quite noticeable the way 'e avoided Bill.

At last one day we got 'im alone down the fo'c'sle, and Bill put 'is arm round 'im and got 'im on the locker and asked 'im straight out where the money was.

' Why, I chucked it overboard,' he says. ' I told you so afore. What a memory you've got, Bill ! '

Bill picked 'im up and laid 'im on the locker, and we searched 'im thoroughly. We even took 'is boots off, and then we 'ad another look in 'is bunk while 'e was putting 'em on ag'in.

'If you're innercent,' says Bill, 'why don't you call out, eh?'

'Because you told me not to say anything about it, Bill,' says the boy. 'But I will next time. Loud, I will.'

'Look 'ere,' says Bill, 'you tell us where it is, and the three of us'll go shares in it. That'll be two 'undered pounds each, and we'll tell you 'ow to get yours changed without getting caught. We're cleverer than you are, you know.'

'I know that, Bill,' says the boy; 'but it's no good me telling you lies. I chucked it over board.'

'Very good, then,' says Bill, getting up. 'I'm going to tell the skipper.'

'Tell 'im,' says Jimmy. 'I don't care.'

'Then you'll be searched *arter you've stepped ashore*,' says Bill, 'and you won't be allowed on the ship ag'in. You'll lose it all by being greedy, whereas if you go shares with us you'll 'ave two 'undered pounds.'

I could see as 'ow the boy 'adn't thought o' that, and try as 'e would 'e couldn't 'ide 'is

## BILL'S PAPER CHASE

feelin's. He called Bill a red-nosed shark, and 'e called me somethin' I've forgotten now.

'Think it over,' says Bill ; 'mind, you'll be collared as soon as you've left the gangway and searched by the police.'

'And will they tickle the cook too, I wonder?' says Jimmy savagely.

'And if they find it you'll go to prison,' says Bill, giving 'im a clump o' the side o' the 'ead, 'and you won't like that, I can tell you.'

'Why, ain't it nice, Bill?' says Jimmy, holding 'is ear.

Bill looked at 'im and then 'e steps to the ladder. 'I'm not going to talk to you any more, my lad,' 'e says. 'I'm going to tell the skipper.'

He went up slowly, and just as 'e reached the deck Jimmy started up and called 'im. Bill pretended not to 'ear, and the boy ran up on deck and follered 'im ; and arter a little while they both came down again together.

'Did you wish to speak to me, my lad?' says Bill, 'olding 'is 'ead up.

'Yes,' says the boy, fiddling with 'is fingers ; 'if you keep your ugly mouth shut, we'll go shares.'

'Ho !' says Bill, 'I thought you throwed it overboard !'

‘ I thought so, too, Bill,’ says Jimmy, very softly, ‘ and when I came below ag’in I found it in my trousers pocket.’

‘ Where is it now ? ’ says Bill.

‘ Never mind where it is,’ says the boy ; ‘ you couldn’t get it if I was to tell you. It’ll take me all my time to do it myself.’

‘ Where is it ? ’ says Bill ag’in. ‘ I’m goin’ to take care of it. I won’t trust you.’

‘ And I can’t trust you,’ says Jimmy.

‘ If you don’t tell me where it is this minute,’ says Bill, moving to the ladder ag’in, ‘ I’m off to tell the skipper. I want it in my ’ands, or at any rate my share of it. Why not share it out now ? ’

‘ Because I ’aven’t got it,’ says Jimmy, stamping ’is foot, ‘ that’s why, and it’s all your silly fault. Arter you came pawing through my pockets when you thought I was asleep I got frightened and ’id it.’

‘ Where ? ’ says Bill.

‘ In the second mate’s mattress,’ says Jimmy. ‘ I was tidying up down aft and I found a ’ole in the underneath side of ’is mattress and I shoved it in there, and poked it in with a bit o’ stick.’

‘ And ’ow are you going to get it ? ’ says Bill, scratching ’is ’ead.

‘ That’s wot I don’t know, seeing that I’m

## BILL'S PAPER CHASE

not allowed aft now,' says Jimmy. 'One of us'll 'ave to make a dash for it when we get to London. And mind, if there's any 'anky-panky on your part, Bill, I'll give the show away myself.'

The cook came down just then and we 'ad to leave off talking, and I could see that Bill was so pleased at finding that the money 'adn't been thrown overboard that 'e was losing sight o' the difficulty o' getting at it. In a day or two, 'owever, 'e see it as plain as me and Jimmy did, and, as time went by, he got desprit, and frightened us both by 'anging about aft every chance 'e got.

The companion-way faced the wheel, and there was about as much chance o' getting down there without being seen as there would be o' taking a man's false teeth out of 'is mouth without 'is knowing it. Jimmy went down one day while Bill was at the wheel to look for 'is knife, wot 'e thought 'e'd left down there, and 'ed 'ardly got down afore Bill saw 'im come up ag'in, 'olding on to the top of a mop which the steward was using.

We couldn't figure it out nohow, and to think o' the second mate, a little man with a large fam'ly, who never 'ad a penny in 'is pocket, sleeping every night on a six 'undered pound mattress, sent us pretty near crazy. We

used to talk it over whenever we got a chance, and Bill and Jimmy could scarcely be civil to each other. The boy said it was Bill's fault, and 'e said it was the boy's.

'The only thing I can see,' says the boy, one day, 'is for Bill to 'ave a touch of sunstroke as 'e's leaving the wheel one day, tumble 'ead-first down the companion-way, and injure 'isself so severely that 'e can't be moved. Then they'll put 'im in a cabin down aft, and p'r'aps I'll 'ave to go and nurse 'im. Anyway, *he'll* be down there.'

'It's a very good idea, Bill,' I says.

'Ho,' says Bill, looking at me as if 'e would eat me. 'Why don't you do it, then?'

'I'd sooner you did it, Bill,' says the boy; 'still, I don't mind which it is. Why not toss up for it?'

'Get away,' says Bill. 'Get away afore I do something you won't like, you bloodthirsty little murderer.'

'I've got a plan myself,' he says, in a low voice, after the boy 'ad 'opped off, 'and if I can't think of nothing better I'll try it, and mind, not a word to the boy.'

He didn't think o' nothing better, and one night just as we was making the Channel 'e tried 'is plan. He was in the second mate's watch, and by-and-by 'e leans over the wheel

## BILL'S PAPER CHASE

and says to 'im in a low voice, ' This is my last v'y'ge, sir.'

' Oh,' says the second mate, who was a man as didn't mind talking to a man before the mast. ' How's that ? '

' I've got a berth ashore, sir,' says Bill, ' and I wanted to ask a favour, sir.'

The second mate growls and walked off a pace or two.

' I've never been so 'appy as I've been on this ship,' says Bill ; ' none of us 'ave. We was saying so the other night, and everybody agreed as it was owing to you, sir, and your kindness to all of us.'

The second mate coughed, but Bill could see as 'e was a bit pleased.

' The feeling came over me,' says Bill, ' that when I leave the sea for good I'd like to 'ave something o' yours to remember you by, sir. And it seemed to me that if I 'ad your mattress I should think of you ev'ry night o' my life.'

' My *wot* ? ' says the second mate, staring at 'im.

' Your mattress, sir,' says Bill. ' If I might make so bold as to offer a pound for it, sir. I want something wot's been used by you, and I've got a fancy for that as a keepsake.'

The second mate shook 'is 'ead. ' I'm sorry,

Bill,' 'e says, gently, ' but I couldn't let it go at that.'

' I'd sooner pay thirty shillin's than not 'ave it, sir,' says Bill 'umbly.

' I gave a lot of money for that mattress,' says the mate ag'in. ' I forgit 'ow much, but a lot. You don't know 'ow valuable that mattress is.'

' I know it's a good one, sir, else you wouldn't 'ave it,' says Bill. ' Would a couple o' pounds buy it, sir ? '

The second mate hum'd and ha'd, but Bill was afeard to go any 'igher. So far as 'e could make out from Jimmy, the mattress was worth about eighteen pence—to anybody who wasn't pertiklar.

' I've slept on that mattress for years,' says the second mate, looking at 'im from the corner of 'is eye. ' I don't believe I could sleep on another. Still, to oblige you, Bill, you shall 'ave it at that if you don't want it till we go ashore? "

' Thankee, sir,' says Bill, 'ardly able to keep from dancing, ' and I'll 'and over the two pounds when we're paid off. I shall keep it all my life, sir, in memory of you and your kindness.'

' And mind you keep quiet about it,' says the second mate, who didn't want the skipper

## BILL'S PAPER CHASE

to know wot 'e'd been doing, ' because I don't want to be bothered by other men wanting to buy things as keepsakes.'

Bill promised 'im like a shot, and when 'e told me about it 'e was nearly crying with joy.

' And mind,' 'e says, ' I've bought that mattress, bought it as it stands, and it's got nothing to do with Jimmy. We'll each pay a pound and halve wot's in it.'

He persuaded me at last, but that boy watched us like a cat watching a couple of canaries, and I could see we should 'ave all we could do to deceive 'im. He seemed more suspicious o' Bill than me, and 'e kep' worrying us nearly every day to know what we were going to do.

We beat about in the Channel with a strong 'ead-wind for four days, and then a tug picked us up and towed us to London.

The excitement of that last little bit was 'orrible. Fust of all we 'ad got to get the mattress, and then in some way we 'ad got to get rid o' Jimmy. Bill's idea was for me to take 'im ashore with me and tell 'im that Bill would join us arterwards, and then lose 'im ; but I said that till I'd got my share I couldn't bear to lose sight o' Bill's honest face for 'alf a second.

And besides, Jimmy wouldn't 'ave gone. All the way up the river 'e stuck to Bill, and kept asking 'im wot we were to do. 'E was 'alf crying, and so excited that Bill was afraid the other chaps would notice it.

We got to our berth in the East India Docks at last, and arter we were made fast we went below to 'ave a wash and change into our shore-going togs. Jimmy watched us all the time, and then 'e comes up to Bill biting 'is nails, and says :

'How's it to be done, Bill?'

'Hang about arter the rest 'ave gone ashore, and trust to luck,' says Bill, looking at me. 'We'll see 'ow the land lays when we draw our advance.'

We went down aft to draw ten shillings each to go ashore with. Bill and me got ours fust, and then the second mate, who 'ad tipped 'im the wink, followed us out unconcerned-like and 'anded Bill the mattress rolled up in a sack.

'Ere you are, Bill,' 'e says.

'Much obliged, sir,' says Bill, and 'is 'ands trembled so as 'e could 'ardly 'old it, and 'e made to go off afore Jimmy come on deck.

Then that fool of a mate kept us there while 'e made a little speech. Twice Bill made to go

## BILL'S PAPER CHASE

off, but 'e put 'is 'and on 'is arm and kept 'im there while 'e told 'im 'ow he'd always tried to be liked by the men, and 'ad generally succeeded, and in the middle of it up popped Master Jimmy.

He gave a start as he saw the bag, and 'is eyes opened wide, and then as we walked forward 'e put 'is arm through Bill's and called 'im all the names 'e could think of.

' You'd steal the milk out of a cat's saucer,' 'e says ; ' but mind, you don't leave this ship till I've got my share.'

' I meant it for a pleasant surprise for you, Jimmy,' says Bill, trying to smile.

' I don't like your surprises, Bill, so I don't deceive you,' says the boy. ' Where are you going to open it ? '

' I was thinking of opening it in my bunk,' says Bill. ' The perlice might want to examine it if we took it through the dock. Come on, Jimmy, old man.'

' Yes ; all right,' says the boy, nodding 'is 'ead at 'im. ' I'll stay up 'ere. You might forget yourself, Bill, if I trusted myself down there with you alone. You can throw my share up to me, and then you'll leave the ship afore I do. See ? '

' Go to blazes,' says Bill ; and then, seeing that the last chance 'ad gone, we went below,

and 'e chucked the bundle in 'is bunk. There was only one chap down there, and arter spending best part o' ten minutes doing 'is hair 'e nodded to us and went off.

Half a minute later Bill cut open the mattress and began to search through the stuffing, while I struck matches and watched 'im. It wasn't a big mattress and there wasn't much stuffing, but we couldn't seem to see that money. Bill went all over it ag'in and ag'in, and then 'e stood up and looked at me and caught 'is breath painful.

'Do you think the mate found it?' 'e says in a 'usky voice.

We went through it ag'in, and then Bill went half-way up the fo'c's'le ladder and called softly for Jimmy. He called three times, and then, with a sinking sensation in 'is stummick, 'e went up on deck and I follered 'im. The boy was nowhere to be seen. All we saw was the ship's cat 'aving a wash and brush-up afore going ashore, and the skipper standing aft talking to the owner.

We never saw that boy ag'in. He never turned up for 'is box, and 'e didn't show up to draw 'is pay. Everybody else was there, of course, and arter I'd got mine and come outside I see pore Bill with 'is back up ag'in a wall, staring 'ard at the second mate, who

## BILL'S PAPER CHASE

was looking at 'im with a kind smile, and asking 'im 'ow he'd slept. The last thing I saw of Bill, the pore chap 'ad got 'is 'ands in 'is trousers pockets, and was trying 'is hardest to smile back.

## II. ALF'S DREAM

‘I’VE just been drinking a man’s health,’ said the night-watchman, coming slowly on to the wharf and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand ; ‘ he’s come in for a matter of three ’undred and twenty pounds, and he stood me arf a pint—arf a pint ! ’

He dragged a small empty towards him, and after planing the surface with his hand sat down and gazed scornfully across the river.

‘ Four ale,’ he said, with a hard laugh ; ‘ and when I asked ’im—just for the look of the thing, and to give ’im a hint—whether he’d ’ave another, he said “ Yes ”.’

The night-watchman rose and paced restlessly up and down the jetty.

‘ Money,’ he said at last, resuming his wonted calm and lowering himself carefully to the box again—Money always gets left to the wrong people ; some of the kindest-’arted men I’ve ever known ’ave never had a ha’penny left ’em, while teetotaller arter teetotaller wot I’ve heard of ’ave come in for fortins.

It’s ’ard lines though, sometimes, waiting for other people’s money. I know o’ one chap that waited over forty years for ’is grandmother to

## ALF'S DREAM

die and leave 'im her money ; and she died of catching cold at 'is funeral. Another chap I knew, arter waiting years and years for 'is rich aunt to die, was hung because she committed suicide.

It's always risky work waiting for other people to die and leave you money. Sometimes they don't die ; sometimes they marry ag'in ; and sometimes they leave it to other people instead.

Talking of marrying agin reminds me o' something that 'appened to a young fellow I knew named Alf Simms. Being an orphan 'e was brought up by his uncle, George Hatchard, a widowed man of about sixty. Alf used to go to sea off and on, but more off than on, his uncle 'aving quite a tidy bit of 'ouse property, and it being understood that Alf was to have it arter he 'ad gone. His uncle used to like to 'ave him at 'ome, and Alf didn't like work, so it suited both parties.

I used to give Alf a bit of advice sometimes, sixty being a dangerous age for a man, especially when he 'as been a widower for so long he 'as had time to forget wot being married's like ; but I must do Alf the credit to say it wasn't wanted. He 'ad got a very old 'ead on his shoulders, and always picked the housekeeper 'imself to save the old man the trouble. I saw

two of 'em, and I dare say I could 'ave seen more, only I didn't want to.

Cleverness is a good thing in its way, but there's such a thing as being too clever, and the last 'ousekeeper young Alf picked died of old age a week arter he 'ad gone to sea. She passed away while she was drawing George Hatchard's supper beer, and he lost ten gallons o' the best bitter ale and his 'ousekeeper at the same time.

It was four months arter that afore Alf came 'ome, and the fust sight of the new 'ousekeeper, wot opened the door to 'im, upset 'im terrible. She was the right side o' sixty to begin with, and only ordinary plain. Then she was as clean as a new pin, and dressed up as though she was going out to tea.

' Oh, you're Alfred, I s'pose ? ' she ses, looking at 'im.

' Mr. Simms is my name,' ses young Alf, starting and drawing hisself up.

' I know you by your portrait,' ses the 'ousekeeper. ' Come in. 'Ave you 'ad a pleasant v'y'ge ? Wipe your boots.'

Alfred wiped 'is boots afore he thought of wot he was doing. Then he drew hisself up stiff agin and marched into the parlour.

' Sit down,' ses the 'ousekeeper, in a kind voice.

## ALF'S DREAM

Alfred sat down afore he thought wot 'e was doing agin.

'I always like to see people comfortable,' ses the 'ousekeeper; 'it's my way. It's warm weather for the time o' year, ain't it? George is upstairs, but he'll be down in a minute.'

'*Who?*' ses Alf, hardly able to believe his ears.

'George,' ses the 'ousekeeper.

'George? George who?' ses Alfred, very severe.

'Why, your uncle of course,' ses the 'ousekeeper. 'Do you think I've got a houseful of Georges?'

Young Alf sat staring at her and couldn't say a word. He noticed that the room 'ad been altered, and that there was a big photograph of her stuck up on the mantelpiece. He sat there fidgeting with 'is feet—until the 'ousekeeper looked at them—and then 'e got up and walked upstairs.

His uncle, wot was sitting on his bed when 'e went into the room and pretended that he 'adn't heard 'im come in, shook hands with 'im as though he'd never leave off.

'I've got something to tell you, Alf,' he ses, arter they 'ad said 'How d'ye do?' and he 'ad talked about the weather until Alf was fair tired of it. 'I've been and gone and done a

foolish thing, and 'ow you'll take it I don't know.'

'Been and asked the new 'ousekeeper to marry you, I s'pose?' ses Alf, looking at 'im very hard.

His uncle shook his 'ead. 'I never asked 'er; I'd take my Davy I didn't,' he ses.

'Well, you ain't going to marry her, then?' ses Alf, brightening up.

His uncle shook 'is head agin. 'She didn't want no asking,' he ses, speaking very slow and mournful. 'I just 'appened to put my arm round her waist by accident one day and the thing was done.'

'Accident? How could you do it by accident?' ses Alf, firing up.

'How can I tell you that?' ses George Hatchard. 'If I'd known 'ow, it wouldn't 'ave been an accident, would it?'

'Don't you want to marry her?' ses Alf at last. 'You needn't marry 'er if you don't want to.'

George Hatchard looked at 'im and sniffed. 'When you know her as well as I do you won't talk so foolish,' he ses. 'We'd better go down now, else she'll think we've been talking about 'er.'

They went downstairs and 'ad tea together, and young Alf soon see the truth of his uncle's

## ALF'S DREAM

remarks. Mrs. Pearce—that was the 'ouse-keeper's name—called his uncle 'dear' every time she spoke to 'im, and arter tea she sat on the sofa side by side with 'im and held his 'and.

Alf lay awake arf that night thinking things over and 'ow to get Mrs. Pearce out of the house, and he woke up next morning with it still on 'is mind. Every time he got 'is uncle alone he spoke to 'im about it, and told 'im to pack Mrs. Pearce off with a month's wages, but George Hatchard wouldn't listen to 'im.

'She'd 'ave me up for breach of promise and ruin me,' he ses. 'She reads the paper to me every Sunday arternoon, mostly breach of promise cases, and she'd 'ave me up for it as soon as look at me. She's got 'eaps and 'eaps of love-letters o' mine.'

'Love-letters!' ses Alf, staring. 'Love-letters when you live in the same house!'

'She started it,' ses his uncle; 'she pushed one under my door one morning, and I 'ad to answer it. She wouldn't come down and get my breakfast till I did. I have to send her one every morning.'

'Do you sign 'em with your own name?' ses Alf, arter thinking a bit.

'No,' ses 'is uncle, turning red.

'Wot do you sign 'em, then?' ses Alf.

'Never you mind,' ses his uncle, turning

redder. 'It's my handwriting, and that's good enough for her. I did try writing backwards, but I only did it once. I wouldn't do it agin for fifty pounds. You ought to ha' heard 'er.'

'If 'er fust husband was alive she couldn't marry you,' ses Alf, very slow and thoughtful.

'No,' ses his uncle, nasty-like; 'and if I was an old woman she couldn't marry me. You know as well as I do that he went down with the *Evening Star* fifteen years ago.'

'So far as she knows,' ses Alf; 'but there was four of them saved, so why not five? Mightn't 'e have floated away on a spar or something and been picked up? Can't you dream it three nights running, and tell 'er that you feel certain sure he's alive?'

'If I dreamt it fifty times it wouldn't make any difference,' ses George Hatchard. 'Here! wot are you up to? 'Ave you gone mad, or wot? You poke me in the ribs like that agin if you dare.'

'Her fust 'usband's alive,' ses Alf, smiling at 'im.

'Wot?' ses his uncle.

'He floated away on a bit o' wreckage,' ses Alf, nodding at 'im, 'just like they do in books, and was picked up more dead than alive and took to Melbourne. He's now living up-country working on a sheep station.'

## ALF'S DREAM

'Who's dreaming now?' ses his uncle.

'It's a fact,' ses Alf. 'I know a chap wot's met 'im and talked to 'im. She can't marry you while he's alive, can she?'

'Certainly *not*,' ses George Hatchard, trembling all over; 'but are you sure you 'avent made a mistake?'

'Certain sure,' ses Alf.

'It's too good to be true,' ses George Hatchard.

'O' course it is,' ses Alf, 'but she won't know that. Look 'ere; you write down all the things that she 'as told you about herself and give it to me, and I'll soon find the chap I spoke of wot's met 'im. He'd meet a dozen men if it was made worth his while.'

George Hatchard couldn't understand 'im at fust, and when he did he wouldn't 'ave a hand in it because it wasn't the right thing to do, and because he felt sure that Mrs. Pearce would find it out. But at last 'e wrote out all about her for Alf; her maiden name, and where she was born, and everything; and then he told Alf that, if 'e dared to play such a trick on an unsuspecting, loving woman he'd never forgive 'im.

'I shall want a couple o' quid,' ses Alf.

'Certainly not,' ses his uncle. 'I won't 'ave nothing to do with it, I tell you.'

‘ Only to buy chocolates with,’ ses Alf.

‘ Oh, all right,’ ses George Hatchard ; and he went upstairs to ’is bedroom and came down with three pounds and gave ’im. ‘ If that ain’t enough,’ he ses, ‘ let me know, and you can ’ave more.’

Alf winked at ’im, but the old man drew hisself up and stared at ’im, and then ’e turned and walked away with his ’ead in the air.

He ’ardly got a chance of speaking to Alf next day, Mrs. Pearce being ’ere, there and everywhere, as the saying is, and finding so many little odd jobs for Alf to do that there was no time for talking. But the day arter he sidled up to ’im when the ’ousekeeper was out of the room and asked ’im whether he ’ad bought the chocolates.

‘ Yes,’ ses Alfred, taking one out of ’is pocket and eating it, ‘ some of ’em.’

George Hatchard coughed and fidgeted about. ‘ When are you going to buy the others ? ’ he ses.

‘ As I want ’em,’ ses Alf. ‘ They’d spoil if I got ’em all at once.’

George Hatchard coughed again. ‘ I ’ope you haven’t been going on with that wicked plan you spoke to me about the other night,’ he ses.

## ALF'S DREAM

‘Certainly not,’ ses Alf, winking to ’imself ;  
‘not arter wot you said. How could I?’

‘That’s right,’ ses the old man. ‘I’m sorry for this marriage for your sake, Alf. O’ course, I was going to leave you my little bit of ’ouse property, but I suppose now it’ll ’ave to be left to her. Well, well, I s’pose it’s best for a young man to make his own way in the world.’

‘I s’pose so,’ ses Alf.

‘Mrs. Pearce was asking only yesterday when you was going back to sea agin,’ ses his uncle, looking at ’im.

‘Oh!’ ses Alf.

‘She’s took a dislike to you, I think,’ ses the old man. ‘It’s very ’ard, my fav’rite nephew, and the only one I’ve got. I forgot to tell you the other day that her fust ’usband, Charlie Pearce, ’ad a kind of wart on ’is left ear. She’s often spoke to me about it.’

‘In-deed!’ ses Alf.

‘Yes,’ ses his uncle, ‘*left* ear, and a scar on his forehead where a friend of his kicked ’im one day.’

Alf nodded, and then he winked at ’im agin. George Hatchard didn’t wink back, but he patted ’im on the shoulder and said ’ow well he was filling out, and ’ow he got more like ’is pore mother every day he lived.

‘I ’ad a dream last night,’ ses Alf. ‘I

dreamt that a man I know named Bill Flurry, but wot called 'imself another name in my dream, and didn't know me then, came ere one evening when we was all sitting down at supper, Joe Morgan and 'is missis being here, and said as 'ow Mrs. Pearce's fust husband was alive and well.'

'That's a very odd dream,' ses his uncle ; 'but wot was Joe Morgan and his missis in it for ?'

'Witnesses,' ses Alf.

George Hatchard fell over a footstool with surprise. 'Go on,' he ses, rubbing his leg. 'It's a queer thing, but I was going to ask the Morgans 'ere to spend the evening next Wednesday.'

'Or was it Tuesday ?' ses Alf, considering.

'I said Tuesday,' ses his uncle, looking over Alf's 'ead so that he needn't see 'im wink agin. 'Wot was the end of your dream, Alf ?'

'The end of it was,' ses Alf, 'that you and Mrs. Pearce was both very much upset, as o' course you couldn't marry while 'er fust was alive, and the last thing I see afore I woke up was her boxes standing at the front door waiting for a cab.'

George Hatchard was going to ask 'im more about it, but just then Mrs. Pearce came in with a pair of Alf's socks that he 'ad been

## ALF'S DREAM

untidy enough to leave in the middle of the floor instead of chucking 'em under the bed. She was so unpleasant about it that, if it hadn't ha' been for the thought of wot was going to 'appen on Tuesday, he couldn't ha' stood it.

For the next day or two George Hatchard was in such a state of nervousness and excitement that Alf was afraid that the 'ousekeeper would notice it. On Tuesday morning he was trembling so much that she said he'd got a chill, and she told 'im to go to bed and she'd make 'im a nice hot mustard poultice. George was afraid to say 'No', but while she was in the kitchen making the poultice he slipped out for a walk and cured 'is trembling with three whiskies. Alf nearly got the poultice instead, she was so angry.

She was unpleasant all dinner-time, but she got better in the arternoon, and when the Morgans came in the evening, and she found that Mrs. Morgan 'ad got a nasty sort o' red swelling in her nose, she got quite good-tempered. She talked about it nearly all supper-time, telling 'er what she ought to do to it, and about a friend of hers that 'ad one and 'ad to turn teetotaller on account of it.

'My nose is good enough for me,' ses Mrs. Morgan at last.

'It don't affect 'er appetite,' ses George

Hatchard, trying to make things pleasant, 'and that's the main thing.'

Mrs. Morgan got up to go, but arter George Hatchard 'ad explained wot he didn't mean she sat down agin and began to talk to Mrs. Pearce about 'er dress and 'ow beautifully it was made. And she asked Mrs. Pearce to give 'er the pattern of it, because she should 'ave one like it herself when she was old enough. 'I do like to see people dressed suitable,' she ses with a smile.

'I think you ought to 'ave a much deeper colour than this,' ses Mrs. Pearce, considering.

'Not when I'm faded,' ses Mrs. Morgan.

Mrs. Pearce, wot was filling 'er glass at the time, spilt a lot of beer all over the tablecloth, and she was so cross about it that she sat like a stone statue for pretty near ten minutes. By the time supper was finished people was passing things to each other in whispers, and when a bit o' cheese went the wrong way with Joe Morgan he nearly suffocated 'imself for fear of making a noise.

They 'ad a game o' cards arter supper, counting twenty nuts as a penny, and everybody got more cheerful. They was all laughing and talking, and Joe Morgan was pretending to steal Mrs. Pearce's nuts, when George Hatchard held up his 'and.

## ALF'S DREAM

'Somebody at the street door, I think,' he ses.

Young Alf got up to open it, and they 'eard a man's voice in the passage asking whether Mrs. Pearce lived there, and the next moment Alf came into the room followed by Bill Flurry.

'Here's a gentleman o' the name o' Smith asking arter you,' he ses, looking at Mrs. Pearce.

'Wot d'you want?' ses Mrs. Pearce, rather sharp.

'It is 'er,' ses Bill, stroking his long white beard and casting 'is eyes up at the ceiling. 'You don't remember me, Mrs. Pearce, but I used to see you years ago, when you and poor Charlie Pearce was living down Poplar way.'

'Well, wot about it?' ses Mrs. Pearce.

'I'm coming to it,' ses Bill Flurry. 'I've been two months trying to find you, so there's no need to be in a hurry for a minute or two. Besides, what I've got to say ought to be broke gently, in case you faint away with joy.'

'Rubbish!' ses Mrs. Pearce. 'I ain't the fainting sort.'

'I 'ope it's nothing unpleasant,' ses George Hatchard, pouring 'im out a glass of whisky.

'Quite the opposite,' ses Bill. 'It's the best news she's 'eard for fifteen years.'

‘Are you going to tell me wot you want, or ain’t you?’ ses Mrs. Pearce.

‘I’m coming to it,’ ses Bill. ‘Six months ago I was in Melbourne, and one day I was strolling about looking in at the shop-winders, when all at once I thought I see a face I knew. It was a good bit older than when I see it last, and the whiskers was grey, but I says to myself——’

‘I can see wot’s coming,’ ses Mrs. Morgan, turning red with excitement and pinching Joe’s arm.

‘I ses to myself,’ ses Bill Flurry, ‘either that’s a ghost, I ses, or else it’s Charlie——’

‘Go on,’ ses George Hatchard, as was sitting with ’is fists clenched on the table and ’is eyes wide open, staring at ’im.

‘Pearce,’ ses Bill Flurry.

You might ’ave heard a pin drop. They all sat staring at ’im, and then George Hatchard took out ’is handkerchief and ’eld it up to ’is face.

‘But he was drowned in the *Evening Star*,’ ses Joe Morgan.

Bill Flurry didn’t answer ’im. He poured out pretty near a tumbler of whisky and offered it to Mrs. Pearce, but she pushed it away, and, arter looking round in a ’elpless sort of way and shaking his ’ead once or twice, he finished it up ’imself.

## ALF'S DREAM

'It couldn't 'ave been 'im,' ses George Hatchard, speaking through 'is handkerchief. 'I can't believe it. It's too cruel.'

'I tell you it was 'im,' ses Bill. 'He floated off on a spar when the ship went down, and was picked up two days arterwards by a barque and taken to New Zealand. He told me all about it, and he told me if ever I saw 'is wife to give her 'is kind regards.'

'*Kind regards!*' ses Joe Morgan, starting up. 'Why didn't he let 'is wife know 'e was alive?'

'That's what I said to 'im,' ses Bill Flurry; 'but he said he 'ad 'is reasons.'

'Ah, to be sure,' ses Mrs. Morgan, nodding. 'Why, you and her can't be married now,' she ses, turning to George Hatchard.

'Married?' ses Bill Flurry, with a start, as George Hatchard gave a groan that surprised 'imself. 'Good gracious! what a good job I found 'er!'

'I s'pose you don't know where he is to be found now?' ses Mrs. Pearce, in a low voice, turning to Bill.

'I do not, ma'am,' ses Bill, 'but I think you'd find 'im somewhere in Australia. He keeps changing 'is name and shifting about, but I dare say you'd 'ave as good a chance of finding 'im as anybody.'

‘It’s a terrible blow to me,’ ses George Hatchard, dabbing his eyes.

‘I know it is,’ ses Mrs. Pearce ; ‘but there, you men are all alike. I dare say if this hadn’t turned up you’d ha’ found something else.’

‘Oh, ’ow can you talk like that?’ ses George Hatchard, very reproachful. ‘It’s the only thing in the world that could ’ave prevented our getting married. I’m surprised at you.’

‘Well, that’s all right then,’ ses Mrs. Pearce, ‘and we’ll get married after all.’

‘But you can’t,’ ses Alf.

‘It’s bigamy,’ ses Joe Morgan.

‘You’d get six months,’ ses his wife.

‘Don’t you worry, dear,’ ses Mrs. Pearce, nodding at George Hatchard ; ‘that man’s made a mistake.’

‘Mistake!’ ses Bill Flurry. ‘Why, I tell you I talked to ’im. It was Charlie Pearce right enough ; scar on ’is forehead and a wart on ’is left ear and all.’

‘It’s wonderful,’ ses Mrs. Pearce. ‘I can’t think where you got it all from.’

‘Got it all from?’ ses Bill, staring at her. ‘Why, from ’im.’

‘Oh, of course,’ ses Mrs. Pearce. ‘I didn’t think of that ; but that only makes it the more wonderful, doesn’t it?—because, you see, he didn’t go on the *Evening Star*.’

## ALF'S DREAM

‘ *Wot?* ’ ses George Hatchard. ‘ Why you told me yourself—— ’

‘ I know I did,’ ses Mrs. Pearce, ‘ but that was only just to spare your feelings. Charlie *was* going to sea in her, but he was prevented.’

‘ Prevented? ’ ses two or three of ’em.

‘ Yes,’ ses Mrs. Pearce ; ‘ the night afore he was to ’ave sailed there was some silly mistake over a diamond ring, and he got five years. He gave a different name at the police station, and naturally everybody thought ’e went down with the ship. And when he died in prison I didn’t undeceive ’em.’

She took out her ’andkerchief, and while she was busy with it Bill Flurry got up and went out on tiptoe. Young Alf got up a second or two arterwards to see where he’d gone ; and the last Joe Morgan and his missis see of the happy couple they was sitting on one chair, and George Hatchard was making desprit and ’eartrending attempts to smile.

### III. KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

‘EVERYBODY is superstitious,’ said the night-watchman, as he gave utterance to a series of chirruping endearments to a black cat with one eye that had just been using a leg of his trousers as a serviette ; ‘ if that cat ’ad stole some men’s suppers they’d have acted foolish, and suffered for it all the rest of their lives.’

He scratched the cat behind the ear, and despite himself his face darkened. ‘ Slung it over the side, they would,’ he said longingly, ‘ and chucked bits o’ coke at it till it sank. As I said afore, everybody is superstitious, and those that ain’t ought to be night-watchmen for a time—that ’ud cure ’em. I knew one man that killed a black cat, and arter that for the rest of his life he could never get three sheets in the wind without seeing its ghost. Spoilt his life for ’im, it did.’

He scratched the cat’s other ear. ‘ I only left it a moment, while I went round to the “ Bull’s Head ”,’ he said, slowly filling his pipe, ‘ and I thought I’d put it out o’ reach. Some men——’

His fingers twined round the animals’ neck ;

then, with a sigh, he rose and took a turn or two on the jetty.

Superstitiousness is right and proper, to a certain extent, he said, resuming his seat ; but, o' course, like everything else, some people carry it too far—they'd believe anything. Weak-minded they are, and if you're in no hurry I can tell you a tale of a pal o' mine, Bill Burtenshaw by name, that'll prove my words.

His mother was superstitious afore 'im, and always knew when 'er friends died by hearing three loud taps on the wall. The on'y mistake she ever made was one night when, arter losing no less than seven friends, she found out it was the man next door hanging pictures at three o'clock in the morning. She found it out by 'im hitting 'is thumb-nail.

For the first few years arter he grew up Bill went to sea, and that on'y made 'im more superstitious than ever. Him and a pal named Silas Winch went several v'y'ges together, and their talk used to be that creepy that some o' the chaps was a'most afraid to be left on deck alone of a night. Silas was a long-faced, miserable sort o' chap, always looking on the black side o' things, and shaking 'is 'ead over it. He thought nothing o' seeing ghosts, and pore old Ben Huggins slept on the floor for a week by reason of a ghost with its throat cut

that Silas saw in his bunk. He gave Silas arf a dollar and a neck-tie to change bunks with 'im.

When Bill Burtenshaw left the sea and got married he lost sight of Silas altogether, and the on'y thing he 'ad to remind him of 'im was a piece o' paper which they 'ad both signed with their blood, promising that the fust one that died would appear to the other. Bill agreed to it one evenin' when he didn't know what he was doing, and for years arterwards 'e used to get the cold creeps down 'is back when he thought of Silas dying fust. And the idea of dying fust 'imself gave 'im cold creeps all over.

Bill was a very good husband when he was sober, but 'is money was two pounds a week, and when a man has all that and on'y a wife to keep out of it it's natural for 'im to drink. Mrs. Burtenshaw tried all sorts o' ways and means of curing 'im, but it was no use. Bill used to think o' ways, too, knowing the 'arm the drink was doing 'im, and his fav'rite plan was for 'is missis to empty a bucket o' cold water over 'im every time he came 'ome the worse for licker. She did it once, but as she 'ad to spend the rest o' the night in the backyard it wasn't tried agin.

Bill got worse as he got older, and even

made away with the furniture to get drink with. And then he used to tell 'is missis that he was drove to the pub because his 'ome was so uncomfortable.

Just at the time things was at their worst, Silas Winch, who 'appened to be ashore and 'ad got Bill's address from a pal, called to see 'im. It was a Saturday arternoon when he called, and, o' course, Bill was out, but 'is missis showed him in, and, arter fetching another chair from the kitchen, asked 'im to sit down.

Silas was very perlite at fust, but arter looking round the room and seeing 'ow bare it was, he gave a little cough, and he ses, 'I thought Bill was doing well?' he ses.

'So he is,' ses Mrs. Burtenshaw.

Silas Winch coughed agin.

'I suppose he likes room to stretch 'imself about in?' he ses, looking round.

Mrs. Burtenshaw wiped 'er eyes, and then, knowing 'ow Silas had been an old friend o' Bill's, she drew 'er chair a bit closer and told him 'ow it was. 'A better 'usband, when he's sober, you couldn't wish to see,' she ses, wiping her eyes again. 'He'd give me anything—if he 'ad it.'

Silas's face got longer than ever. 'As a matter o' fact,' he ses, 'I'm a bit down on my luck, and I called round with the 'ope that

Bill could lend me a bit, just till I can pull round.'

Mrs. Burtenshaw shook her 'ead.

' Well, I s'pose I can stay and see 'im ? ' ses Silas. ' Me and 'im used to be great pals at one time, and many's the good turn I've done him. Wot time'll he be 'ome ? '

' Any time after twelve,' ses Mrs. Burtenshaw ; ' but you'd better not be here then. You see, 'im being in that condition, he might think you was your own ghost come according to promise and be frightened out of 'is life. He's often talked about it.'

Silas Winch scratched his head and looked at 'er thoughtful-like.

' Why shouldn't he mistake me for a ghost ? ' he ses at last ; ' the shock might do 'im good. And, if you come to that, why shouldn't I pretend to be my own ghost and warn 'im off the drink ? '

Mrs. Burtenshaw got so excited at the idea she couldn't 'ardly speak, but at last, arter saying over and over agin she wouldn't do such a thing for worlds, she and Silas arranged that he should come in at about three o'clock in the morning and give Bill a solemn warning. She gave 'im her key, and Silas said he'd come in with his 'air and cap all wet and pretend he'd been drowned.

## KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

‘It’s very kind of you to take all this trouble for nothing,’ ses Mrs. Burtenshaw, as Silas got up to go.

‘Don’t mention it,’ ses Silas. ‘It ain’t the fust time, and I don’t suppose it’ll be the last, that I’ve put myself out to help my feller-creeturs. We all ought to do wot we can for each other.’

‘Mind, if he finds it out,’ ses Mrs. Burtenshaw, all of a tremble, ‘I don’t know nothing about it. P’r’aps to make it more lifelike I’d better pretend not to see you.’

‘P’r’aps it would be better,’ ses Silas, stopping at the street door. ‘All I ask is that you’ll ’ide the poker and anything else that might be laying about handy. And you ’ad better oil the lock so as the key won’t make a noise.’

Mrs. Burtenshaw shut the door arter ’im, and then she went in and ’ad a quiet sit-down all by ’erself to think it over. The only thing that comforted ’er was that Bill would be in licker, and also that ’e would believe anything in the ghost line.

It was past twelve when a couple o’ pals brought him ’ome, and, arter offering to fight all six of ’em, one arter the other, Bill hit the wall for getting in ’is way, and tumbled upstairs to bed. In less than ten minutes ’e was

fast asleep, and pore Mrs. Burtenshaw, arter trying her best to keep awake, fell asleep too.

She was woke up suddenly by a noise that froze the marrer in 'er bones—the most 'art-rending groan she 'ad ever heard in 'er life; and, raising her 'ead, she saw Silas Winch standing at the foot of the bed. He 'ad done his face and hands over with wot is called loominous paint, his cap was pushed at the back of his 'ead, and wet wisps of 'air was hanging over his eyes. For a moment Mrs. Burtenshaw's 'art stood still, and then Silas let off another groan that put her on edge all over. It was a groan that seemed to come from nothing a'most until it spread into a roar that made the room tremble and rattled the jug in the washstand basin. It shook everything in the room but Bill, and he went on sleeping like an infant. Silas did two more groans, and then 'e leaned over the foot o' the bed and stared at Bill, as though 'e couldn't believe his eyesight.

'Try a squeaky one,' ses Mrs. Burtenshaw.

Silas tried five squeaky ones, and then he 'ad a fit o' coughing that would ha' woke the dead, as they say, but it didn't wake Bill.

'Now some more deep ones,' ses Mrs. Burtenshaw in a w'isper.

Silas licked his lips—forgetting the paint—and tried the deep ones agin.

‘Now mix ’em a bit,’ ses Mrs. Burtenshaw.

Silas stared at her. ‘Look ’ere,’ he ses, very short, ‘do you think I’m a fog-horn, or wot?’

He stood there sulky for a moment, and then ’e invented a noise that nothing living could miss hearing; even Bill couldn’t. He moved in ’is sleep, and arter Silas ’ad done it twice more he turned and spoke to ’is missis about it. ‘D’ye hear?’ he ses; ‘stop it. Stop it at once.’

Mrs. Burtenshaw pretended to be asleep, and Bill was just going to turn over agin when Silas let off another groan. It was on’y a little one this time, but Bill sat up as though he ’ad been shot, and he no sooner caught sight of Silas standing there than ’e gave a dreadful ’owl and, rolling over, wropped ’imself up in all the bed-clothes ’e could lay his ’ands on. Then Mrs. Burtenshaw gave a ’owl and tried to get some of ’em back; but Bill, thinking it was the ghost, only held on tighter than ever.

‘BILL,’ ses Silas Winch, in an awful voice.

Bill gave a kick, and tried to bore a hole through the bed.

‘Bill,’ ses Silas agin, ‘why don’t you answer me? I’ve come all the way from the bottom of the Pacific Ocean to see you, and this is

all I get for it. Haven't you got anything to say to me?'

'Good-bye,' ses Bill, in a voice all smothered with the bed-clothes.

Silas Winch groaned agin, and Bill, as the shock 'ad made him a'most sober, trembled all over.

'The moment I died,' ses Silas, 'I thought of my promise towards you. "Bill's expecting me," I ses, and, instead of staying in comfort at the bottom of the sea, I kicked off the body of the cabin-boy wot was clinging round my leg, and 'ere I am.'

'It was very t-t-t-thoughtful—of you—Silas,' ses Bill; 'but you always w-w-was—thoughtful. Good-bye.'

Afore Silas could answer, Mrs. Burtenshaw, who felt more comfortable, 'aving got a bit o' the clothes back, thought it was time to put 'er spoke in.

'Lor' bless me, Bill,' she ses. 'Wotever are you a-talking to yourself like this for? 'Ave you been dreaming?'

'Dreaming!' ses pore Bill, catching hold of her 'and and gripping her till she nearly screamed. 'I wish I was. Can't you see it?'

'See it?' ses his wife. 'See wot?'

'The ghost,' ses Bill, in a 'orrible whisper; 'the ghost of my dear, kind old pal Silas

Winch. The best and noblest pal a man ever 'ad. The kindest-'arted——'

'Rubbish,' ses Mrs. Burtenshaw. 'You've been dreaming. And as for the kindest-'arted pal, why I've often heard you say——'

'*Hsh!*' ses Bill. 'I didn't. I'll swear I didn't. I never thought of such a thing.'

'You turn over and go to sleep,' ses his wife; 'hiding your 'ead under the clothes like a child that's afraid o' the dark! There's nothing there, I tell you. Wot next will you see, I wonder? Last time it was a pink rat.'

'This is fifty million times worse than pink rats,' ses Bill. 'I on'y wish it was a pink rat.'

'I tell you there is nothing there,' ses his wife. 'Look!'

Bill put his 'ead up and looked, and then 'e gave a dreadful scream and dived under the bed-clothes agin.

'Oh, well, 'ave it your own way, then,' ses his wife. 'If it pleases you to think there is a ghost there, and to go on talking to it, do so, and welcome.'

She turned over and pretended to go to sleep agin, and arter a minute or two Silas spoke agin in the same hollow voice.

'Bill!' he ses.

'Yes,' ses Bill, with a groan of his own.

'She can't see me,' ses Silas, 'and she can't 'ear me ; but I'm 'ere all right. Look !'

'I 'ave looked,' ses Bill, with his 'ead still under the clothes.

'We was always pals, Bill, you and me,' ses Silas ; 'many a v'y'ge 'ave we had together, mate, and now I'm a-laying at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, and you are snug and 'appy in your own warm bed. I 'ad to come to see you, according to promise, and, over and above that, since I was drownded my eyes 'ave been opened. Bill, you're drinking yourself to death !'

'I—I—didn't know it,' ses Bill, shaking all over. 'I'll knock it—off a bit, and—thank you—for—w-w-warning me. G-g-good-bye.'

'You'll knock it off altogether,' ses Silas Winch, in a awful voice. 'You're not to touch another drop of beer, wine, or spirits as long as you live. D'ye hear me ?'

'Not—not as medicine ?' ses Bill, holding the clothes up a bit so as to be more distinct.

'Not as anything,' ses Silas ; 'not even over Christmas pudding. Raise your right arm above your 'ead and swear by the ghost of pore Silas Winch, as is laying at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, that you won't touch another drop.'

Bill Burtenshaw put 'is arm up and swore it.

## KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

Then 'e took 'is arm in agin and lay there wondering wot was going to 'appen next.

'If you ever break your oath by on'y so much as a teaspoonful,' ses Silas, 'you'll see me agin, and the second time you see me you'll die as if struck by lightning. No man can see me twice and live.'

Bill broke out in a cold perspiration all over. 'You'll be careful, won't you, Silas?' he ses. 'You'll remember you 'ave seen me once, I mean?'

'And there's another thing afore I go,' ses Silas. 'I've left a widder, and if she don't get 'elp from some one she'll starve.'

'Pore thing,' ses Bill. 'Pore thing.'

'If you 'ad died afore me,' ses Silas, 'I should 'ave looked arter your good wife—wot I've now put in a sound sleep—as long as I lived.'

Bill didn't say anything.

'I should 'ave given 'er fifteen shillings a week,' ses Silas.

'*Ow much?*' ses Bill, nearly putting his 'ead up over the clothes, while 'is wife almost woke up with surprise and anger.

'Fifteen shillings,' ses Silas, in 'is most awful voice. 'You'll save that over the drink.'

'I—I'll go round and see her,' ses Bill. 'She might be one o' these 'ere independent——'

‘ I forbid you to go near the place,’ ses Silas. ‘ Send it by post every week ; 15 Shap Street will find her. Put your arm up and swear it ; same as you did afore.’

Bill did as ’e was told, and then ’e lay and trembled, as Silas gave three more awful groans.

‘ Farewell, Bill,’ he ses. ‘ Farewell. I am going back to my bed at the bottom o’ the sea. So long as you keep both your oaths I shall stay there. If you break one of ’em or go to see my pore wife I shall appear agin. Farewell ! Farewell ! Farewell !’

Bill said ‘ Good-bye,’ and, arter a long silence, he ventured to put an eye over the edge of the clothes and discovered that the ghost ’ad gone. He lay awake for a couple o’ hours, wondering and saying over the address to himself so that he shouldn’t forget it, and just afore it was time to get up he fell into a peaceful slumber. His wife didn’t get a wink, and she lay there trembling with passion to think ’ow she’d been done, and wondering ’ow she was to alter it.

Bill told ’er all about it in the morning ; and then with tears in his eyes ’e went downstairs and emptied a little barrel o’ beer down the sink. For the fust two or three days ’e went about with a thirst that he’d ha’ given pounds

## KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

for if 'e'd been allowed to satisfy it, but arter a time it went off, and then, like all teetotallers, 'e began to run down drink and call it p'ison.

The fust thing 'e did when 'e got his money on Friday was to send off a post-office order to Shap Street, and Mrs. Burtenshaw cried with rage and 'ad to put it down to the headache. She 'ad the headache every Friday for a month, and Bill, wot was feeling stronger and better than he 'ad done for years, felt quite sorry for her.

By the time Bill 'ad sent off six orders she was worn to skin and bone a'most a-worrying over the way Silas Winch was spending her money. She dursn't undeceive Bill for two reasons : fust of all because she didn't want 'im to take to drink agin ; and, secondly, for fear of wot he might do to 'er if 'e found out 'ow she'd been deceiving 'im.

She was laying awake thinking it over one night while Bill was sleeping peaceful by her side, when all of a sudden she 'ad an idea. The more she thought of it the better it seemed ; but she laid awake for ever so long afore she dared to do more than think. Three or four times she turned and looked at Bill and listened to 'im breathing, and then, trembling all over with fear and excitement, she began 'er little game.

'*He did send it,*' she ses, with a piercing scream. '*He did send it.*'

'W-w-wot's the matter?' ses Bill, beginning to wake up.

Mrs. Burtenshaw didn't take any notice of 'im.

'He did send it,' she ses, screaming agin. 'Every Friday night reg'lar. Oh, *don't let 'im see you again.*'

Bill, wot was just going to ask 'er whether she 'ad gone mad, gave a awful 'owl and disappeared right down in the middle o' the bed.

'There's some mistake,' ses Mrs. Burtenshaw, in a voice that could ha' been 'eard through arf a dozen beds easy. 'It must ha' been lost in the post. It must ha' been.'

She was silent for a few seconds, then she ses, 'All right,' she ses, 'I'll bring it myself then by hand every week. No, Bill shan't come; I'll promise that for 'im. Do go away; he might put his 'ead up at any moment.'

She began to gasp and sob, and Bill began to think wot a good wife he 'ad got, when he felt 'er put a couple of pillers over where she judged his 'ead to be, and hold 'em down with her arm.

'Thank you, Mr. Winch,' she ses, very loud, 'thank you. Good-bye. Good-bye.'

## KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

She began to quieten down a bit, although little sobs, like wimmen use when they pretend that they want to leave off crying but can't, kept breaking out of 'er. Then, by and by, she quieted down altogether, and a husky voice from near the foot of the bed ses : ' Has it gorn ? '

' Oh, Bill,' she ses, with another sob, ' I've seen the ghost ! '

' Has it gorn ? ' ses Bill again.

' Yes, it's gorn,' ses his wife, shivering. ' Oh, Bill, it stood at the foot of the bed looking at me, with its face and 'ands all shiny white, and damp curls on its forehead. Oh ! '

Bill came up very slow and careful, but with 'is eyes still shut.

' His wife didn't get the money this week,' ses Mrs. Burtenshaw ; ' but as he thought there might be a mistake somewhere he appeared to me instead of to you. I've got to take the money by hand.'

' Yes, I heard,' ses Bill ; ' and mind, if you should lose it or be robbed of it, let me know at once. D'ye hear ? *At once !* '

' Yes, Bill,' ses 'is wife.

They lay quiet for some time, although Mrs. Burtenshaw still kept trembling and shaking ; and then Bill ses : ' Next time a man tells you he 'as seen a ghost, p'r'aps you'll believe in 'im.'

Mrs. Burtenshaw took out the end of the sheet wot she 'ad stuffed in 'er mouth when 'e began to speak.

' Yes, Bill,' she ses.

Bill Burtenshaw gave 'er the fifteen shillings next morning and every Friday night arterwards ; and that's 'ow it is that, while other wimmen 'as to be satisfied looking at new hats and clothes in the shop-winders, Mrs. Burtenshaw is able to wear 'em.

#### IV. HOMEWARD BOUND

MR. HATCHARD'S conversation for nearly a week had been confined to fault-finding and grunts, a system of treatment designed to wean Mrs. Hatchard from her besetting sin of extravagance. On other occasions the treatment had, for short periods, proved successful, but it was quite evident that his wife's constitution was becoming inured to this physic and required a change of treatment. The evidence stared at him from the mantelpiece in the shape of a pair of huge pink vases, which had certainly not been there when he left in the morning. He looked at them and breathed heavily.

'Pretty, ain't they?' said his wife, nodding at them.

'Who gave 'em to you?' inquired Mr. Hatchard sternly.

His wife shook her head. 'You don't get vases like that given to you,' she said, slowly. 'Leastways, I don't.'

'Do you mean to say you bought 'em?' demanded her husband.

Mrs. Hatchard nodded.

'After all I said to you about wasting my

money?' persisted Mr. Hatchard, in amazed accents.

Mrs. Hatchard nodded more brightly than before.

'There has got to be an end to this!' said her husband desperately. 'I won't have it! D'ye hear? I won't—have—it!'

'I bought 'em with my own money,' said his wife, tossing her head.

'Your money?' said Mr. Hatchard. 'To hear you talk, anybody 'ud think you'd got three hundred a year, instead of thirty. Your money ought to be spent in useful things, same as what mine is. Why should I spend my money keeping you, while you waste yours on pink vases and having friends in to tea?'

Mrs. Hatchard's still comely face took on a deeper tinge.

'Keeping me?' she said sharply. 'You'd better stop before you say anything you might be sorry for, Alfred.'

'I should have to talk a long time before I said that,' retorted the other.

'I'm not so sure,' said his wife. 'I'm beginning to be tired of it.'

'I've reasoned with you,' continued Mr. Hatchard, 'I've argued with you, and I've pointed out the error of your ways to you, and it's all no good.'

## HOMeward BOUND

‘ Oh, be quiet, and don’t talk nonsense,’ said his wife.

‘ Talking,’ continued Mr. Hatchard, ‘ as I said before, is no good. Deeds, not words, is what is wanted.’

He rose suddenly from his chair, and, taking one of the vases from the mantelpiece, dashed it to pieces on the fender. Example is contagious, and two seconds later he was in his chair again, softly feeling a rapidly growing bump on his head, and gazing goggle-eyed at his wife.

‘ And I’d do it again,’ said that lady breathlessly, ‘ if there was another vase.’

Mr. Hatchard opened his mouth, but speech failed him. He got up and left the room without a word, and, making his way to the scullery, turned on the tap and held his head beneath it. A sharp intake of the breath announced that a tributary stream was looking for the bump down the neck of his shirt.

He was away a long time—so long that the half-penitent Mrs. Hatchard was beginning to think of giving first aid to the wounded. Then she heard him coming slowly back along the passage. He entered the room, drying his wet hair on a handkerchief.

‘ I—I hope I didn’t hurt you—much ? ’ said his wife.

Mr. Hatchard drew himself up and regarded her with lofty indignation.

‘ You might have killed me,’ he said at last in thrilling tones. ‘ Then what would you have done ? ’

‘ Swept up the pieces, and said you came home injured and died in my arms,’ said Mrs. Hatchard glibly. ‘ I don’t want to be unfeeling, but you’d try the temper of a saint. I’m sure I wonder I haven’t done it before. Why I married a stingy man I don’t know.’

‘ Why I married at all I don’t know,’ said her husband in a deep voice.

‘ We were both fools,’ said Mrs. Hatchard in a resigned voice ; ‘ that’s what it was. However, it can’t be helped now.’

‘ Some men would go and leave you,’ said Mr. Hatchard.

‘ Well, go,’ said his wife, bridling. ‘ I don’t want you.’

‘ Don’t talk nonsense,’ said the other.

‘ It ain’t nonsense,’ said Mrs. Hatchard. ‘ If you want to go, go. I don’t want to keep you.’

‘ I only wish I could,’ said her husband wistfully.

‘ There’s the door,’ said Mrs. Hatchard, pointing. ‘ What’s to prevent you ?.’

‘ And have you going to the magistrate ? ’ observed Mr. Hatchard.

‘Not me,’ was the reply.

‘Or coming up, full of complaints, to the warehouse.’

‘Not me,’ said his wife again.

‘It makes my mouth water to think of it,’ said Mr. Hatchard. ‘Four years ago I hadn’t a care in the world.’

‘Me neither,’ said Mrs. Hatchard; ‘but then I never thought I should marry you. I remember the first time I saw you I had to stuff my handkerchief in my mouth.’

‘What for?’ inquired Mr. Hatchard.

‘Keep from laughing,’ was the reply.

‘You took care not to let me see you laugh,’ said Mr. Hatchard grimly. ‘You were polite enough in them days. I only wish I could have my time over again; that’s all.’

‘You can go, as I said before,’ said his wife.

‘I’d go this minute,’ said Mr. Hatchard, ‘but I know what it ’ud be: in three or four days you’d be coming and begging me to take you back again.’

‘You try me,’ said Mrs. Hatchard with a hard laugh. ‘I can keep myself. You leave me the furniture—most of it is mine—and I shan’t worry you again.’

‘Mind!’ said Mr. Hatchard, raising his hand with great solemnity, ‘if I go, I never come back again.’

‘ I’ll take care of that,’ said his wife equably. ‘ You are far more likely to ask to come back than I am.’

Mr. Hatchard stood for some time in deep thought, and then, spurred on by a short, contemptuous laugh from his wife, went to the small passage, and, putting on his overcoat and hat, stood in the parlour doorway regarding her.

‘ I’ve a good mind to take you at your word,’ he said at last.

‘ Good night,’ said his wife briskly. ‘ If you send me your address I’ll send your things on to you. There’s no need for you to call about them.’

Hardly realizing the seriousness of the step, Mr. Hatchard closed the front door behind him with a bang, and then discovered that it was raining. Too proud to return for his umbrella, he turned up his coat-collar and, thrusting his hands in his pockets, walked slowly down the desolate little street. By the time he had walked a dozen yards he began to think that he might as well have waited until the morning ; before he had walked fifty he was certain of it.

He passed the night at a coffee-house, and rose so early in the morning that the proprietor took it as a personal affront, and advised him

to get his breakfast elsewhere. It was the longest day in Mr. Hatchard's experience, and, securing modest lodgings that evening, he overslept himself and was late at the warehouse next morning for the first time in ten years.

His personal effects arrived next day, but no letter came from his wife, and one which he wrote concerning a pair of missing garments received no reply. He wrote again, referring to them in laudatory terms, and got a brief reply to the effect that they had been exchanged in part payment of a pair of valuable pink vases, the pieces of which he could have by paying the carriage.

In six weeks Mr. Hatchard changed his lodgings twice. A lack of those home comforts which he had taken as a matter of course during his married life was a source of much tribulation, and it was clear that his weekly bills were compiled by a clever writer of fiction. It was his first experience of lodgings, and the difficulty of saying unpleasant things to a woman other than his wife was not the least of his troubles. He changed his lodgings for a third time, and, much surprised at his wife's continued silence, sought out a cousin of hers named Joe Pett, and poured his troubles into that gentleman's reluctant ear.

'If she was to ask me to take her back,' he

concluded, 'I'm not sure, mind you, that I wouldn't do so.'

'It does you credit,' said Mr. Pett. 'Well, ta-ta ; I must be off.'

'And I expect she'd be very much obliged to anybody that told her so,' said Mr. Hatchard, clutching at the other's sleeve.

Mr. Pett, gazing into space, said that he thought it highly probable.

'It wants to be done cleverly, though,' said Mr. Hatchard, 'else she might get the idea that I wanted to go back.'

'I s'pose you know she's moved?' said Mr. Pett, with the air of a man anxious to change the conversation.

'Eh?' said the other.


'Number thirty-seven, John Street,' said Mr. Pett. 'Told my wife she's going to take in lodgers. Calling herself Mrs. Harris, after her maiden name.'

He went off before Mr. Hatchard could recover, and the latter at once verified the information in part by walking round to his old house. Bits of straw and paper littered the front garden, the blinds were down, and a bill was pasted on the front parlour window. Aghast at such determination, he walked back to his lodgings in gloomy thought.

On Saturday afternoon he walked round to

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John Street, and from the corner of his eye, as he passed, stole a glance at No. 37. He recognized the curtains at once, and, seeing that there was nobody in the room, leaned over the palings and peered at a card that stood on the window-sash :

FURNISHED APARTMENTS  
FOR SINGLE YOUNG MAN  
BOARD IF DESIRED 

He walked away whistling, and after going a little way turned and passed it again. He passed in all four times, and then, with an odd grin lurking at the corners of his mouth, strode up to the front door and knocked loudly. He heard somebody moving about inside, and, more with the idea of keeping his courage up than anything else, gave another heavy knock at the door. It was thrown open hastily, and the astonished face of his wife appeared before him.

‘What do you want?’ she inquired sharply. Mr. Hatchard raised his hat. ‘Good afternoon, ma’am,’ he said politely.

‘What do you want?’ repeated his wife.

‘I called,’ said Mr. Hatchard, clearing his throat—‘I called about the bill in the window.’

Mrs. Hatchard clutched at the doorpost.

‘Well?’ she gasped.

‘ I’d like to see the rooms,’ said the other.

‘ But you ain’t a single young man,’ said his wife, recovering.

‘ I’m as good as single,’ said Mr. Hatchard. ‘ I should say better.’

‘ You ain’t young,’ objected Mrs. Hatchard.

‘ I’m three years younger than what you are,’ said Mr. Hatchard dispassionately.

His wife’s lips tightened and her hand closed on the door ; Mr. Hatchard put his foot in.

‘ If you don’t want lodgers, why do you put a bill up ? ’ he inquired.

‘ I don’t take the first that comes,’ said his wife.

‘ I’ll pay a week in advance,’ said Mr. Hatchard, putting his hand in his pocket. ‘ Of course, if you’re afraid of having me here—afraid o’ giving way to tenderness, I mean——’

‘ Afraid ? ’ choked Mrs. Hatchard. ‘ Tenderness ! I—I——’

‘ Just a matter o’ business,’ continued her husband, ‘ that’s my way of looking at it—that’s a *man’s* way. I s’pose women are different. They can’t——’

‘ Come in,’ said Mrs. Hatchard, breathing hard.

Mr. Hatchard obeyed, and clapping a hand over his mouth ascended the stairs behind her.

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At the top she threw open the door of a tiny bedroom, and stood aside for him to enter. Mr. Hatchard sniffed critically.

‘Smells rather stuffy,’ he said at last.

‘You needn’t have it,’ said his wife abruptly.

‘There’s plenty of other fish in the sea.’

‘Yes ; and I expect they’d stay there if they saw this room,’ said the other.

‘Don’t think I want you to have it ; because I don’t,’ said Mrs. Hatchard, making a preliminary movement to showing him downstairs.

‘They might suit me,’ said Mr. Hatchard musingly, as he peeped in at the sitting-room door. ‘I shouldn’t be at home much. I’m a man that’s fond of spending his evenings out.’

Mrs. Hatchard, checking a retort, eyed him grimly.

‘I’ve seen worse,’ he said slowly ; ‘but then I’ve seen a good many. How much are you asking ?’

‘Seven shillings a week,’ replied his wife. ‘With breakfast, tea, and supper, a pound a week.’

Mr. Hatchard nearly whistled, but checked himself just in time.

‘I’ll give it a trial,’ he said, with an air of unbearable patronage.

Mrs. Hatchard hesitated.

‘ If you come here, you quite understand it’s on a business footing ? ’ she said.

‘ O’ course,’ said the other, with affected surprise. ‘ What do you think I want it on ? ’

‘ You come here as a stranger, and I look after you as a stranger,’ continued his wife.

‘ Certainly,’ said the other. ‘ I shall be made more comfortable that way, I’m sure. But, of course, if you’re afraid, as I said before, of giving way to tender——’

‘ Tender fiddlesticks ! ’ interrupted his wife, flushing and eyeing him angrily.

‘ I’ll come in and bring my things at nine o’clock to-night,’ said Mr. Hatchard. ‘ I’d like the windows open and the rooms aired a bit. And what about the sheets ? ’

‘ What about them ? ’ inquired his wife.

‘ Don’t put me in damp sheets, that’s all,’ said Mr. Hatchard. ‘ One place I was at——’

He broke off suddenly.

‘ Well ? ’ said his wife quickly.

‘ Was very particular about them,’ said Mr. Hatchard, recovering. ‘ Well, good afternoon to you, ma’am.’

‘ I want three weeks in advance,’ said his wife.

‘ Three ! ’ exclaimed the other. ‘ Three weeks in advance. Why—— ? ’

‘ Those are my terms,’ said Mrs. Hatchard.

‘Take ’em or leave ’em. P’r’aps it would be better if you left ’em.’

Mr. Hatchard looked thoughtful, and then with obvious reluctance took his purse from one pocket and some silver from another, and made up the required sum.

‘And what if I’m not comfortable here?’ he inquired, as his wife hastily pocketed the money.

‘It’ll be your own fault,’ was the reply.

Mr. Hatchard looked dubious, and, in a thoughtful fashion, walked downstairs and let himself out. He began to think that the joke was of a more complicated nature than he had expected, and it was not without forebodings that he came back at nine o’clock that night accompanied by a boy with his baggage.

His gloom disappeared the moment the door opened. The air inside was warm and comfortable, and pervaded by an appetizing smell of cooked meats. Upstairs a small, bright fire and a neatly laid supper-table awaited his arrival.

He sank into an easy-chair and rubbed his hands. Then his gaze fell on a small bell on the table, and opening the door he rang for supper.

‘Yes, sir,’ said Mrs. Hatchard, entering the room.

‘Supper, please,’ said the new lodger, with dignity.

Mrs. Hatchard looked bewildered. ‘Well, there it is,’ she said, indicating the table. ‘You don’t want me to feed you, do you?’

The lodger eyed the small, dry piece of cheese, the bread and butter, and his face fell. ‘I—I thought I smelt something cooking,’ he said at last.

‘Oh, that was *my* supper,’ said Mrs. Hatchard with a smile.

‘I—I’m very hungry,’ said Mr. Hatchard, trying to keep his temper.

‘It’s the cold weather, I expect,’ said Mrs. Hatchard thoughtfully; ‘it does affect some people that way, I know. Please ring if you want anything.’

She left the room, humming blithely, and Mr. Hatchard, after sitting for some time in silent consternation, got up and ate his frugal meal. The fact that the water-jug held three pints and was filled to the brim gave him no satisfaction.

He was still hungry when he arose next morning, and, with curiosity tempered by uneasiness, waited for his breakfast. Mrs. Hatchard came in at last, and after polite inquiries as to how he had slept, proceeded to lay breakfast. A fresh loaf and a large teapot

appeared, and the smell of frizzling bacon ascended from below. Then Mrs. Hatchard came in again, and, smiling benevolently, placed an egg before him and withdrew. Two minutes later he rang the bell.

‘You can clear away,’ he said as Mrs. Hatchard entered the room.

‘What, no breakfast?’ she said, holding up her hands. ‘Well, I’ve heard of you single young men, but I never thought——’

‘The tea’s cold and as black as ink,’ growled the indignant lodger, ‘and the egg ought to be ashamed of itself.’

‘I’m afraid you’re a bit of a fault-finder,’ said Mrs. Hatchard, shaking her head at him. ‘I’m sure I try my best to please. I don’t mind what I do, but if you’re not satisfied you’d better go.’

‘Look here, Emily——’ began her husband.

‘Don’t you “Emily” me!’ said Mrs. Hatchard quickly. ‘The idea! A lodger, too! You know the arrangement. You’d better go, I think, if you can’t behave yourself.’

‘I won’t go till my three weeks are up,’ said Mr. Hatchard doggedly, ‘so you may as well behave *yourself*.’

‘I can’t pamper you for a pound a week,’

said Mrs. Hatchard, walking to the door. 'If you want pampering you had better go.'

A week passed, and the additional expense caused by getting most of his meals out began to affect Mr. Hatchard's health. His wife, on the contrary, was in excellent spirits, and, coming in one day, explained the absence of the easy-chair, by stating that it was wanted for a new lodger.

'He's taken my other two rooms,' she said, smiling—'the little back parlour and the front bedroom; I'm full up now.'

'Wouldn't he like my table too?' inquired Mr. Hatchard, with bitter sarcasm.

His wife said that she would inquire, and brought back word next day that Mr. Sadler, the new lodger, would like it. It disappeared during Mr. Hatchard's enforced absence at business, and a small bamboo table, weak in the joints, did duty in its stead.

The new lodger, a man of middle age with a ready tongue, was a success from the first, and it was only too evident that Mrs. Hatchard was trying her best to please him. Mr. Hatchard, supping on bread and cheese, more than once left that wholesome meal to lean over the balusters and smell the hot meats going in to Mr. Sadler.

'You're spoiling him,' he said to Mrs.

Hatchard, after the new lodger had been there a week. 'Mark my words—he'll get above himself.'

'That's my look-out,' said his wife briefly.

'Don't come to me if you get into trouble, that's all,' said the other.

Mrs. Hatchard laughed derisively. 'You don't like him, that's what it is,' she remarked. 'He asked me yesterday whether he had offended you in any way.'

'Oh! he did, did he?' snarled Mr. Hatchard. 'Let him keep himself to himself, and mind his own business.'

'He said he thinks you have got a bad temper,' continued his wife. 'He thinks perhaps it's indigestion, caused by eating cheese for supper always.'

Mr. Hatchard affected not to hear, and, lighting his pipe, listened for some time to the hum of conversation between his wife and Mr. Sadler below. With an expression of resignation on his face that was almost saintly, he knocked out his pipe at last and went to bed.

Half an hour passed, and he was still awake. His wife's voice had ceased, but the gruff tones of Mr. Sadler were still audible. Then he sat up in bed and listened, as a faint cry of alarm and the sound of somebody rushing upstairs fell on his ears. The next moment the door of

his room burst open, and a wild figure, stumbling in the darkness, rushed over to the bed and clasped him in its arms.

‘*Help!*’ gasped his wife’s voice. ‘Oh, Alfred! Alfred!’

‘Ma’am!’ said Mr. Hatchard in a prim voice, as he struggled in vain to free himself.

‘I’m so—so—fr-frightened!’ sobbed Mrs. Hatchard.

‘That’s no reason for coming into a lodger’s room and throwing your arms round his neck,’ said her husband severely.

‘Don’t be stu-stu-stupid,’ gasped Mrs. Hatchard. ‘He—he’s sitting downstairs in my room with a paper cap on his head and a fire-shovel in his hand, and he—he says he’s the—the Emperor of China.’

‘He? Who?’ inquired her husband.

‘Mr. Sad-Sadler,’ replied Mrs. Hatchard, almost strangling him. ‘He made me kneel in front of him and keep touching the floor with my head.’

The chair-bedstead shook in sympathy with Mr. Hatchard’s husbandly emotion.

‘Well, it’s nothing to do with me,’ he said at last.

‘He’s *mad*,’ said his wife in a tense whisper; ‘stark staring mad. He says I’m his favourite wife, and he made me stroke his forehead.’

## HOMeward BOUND

The bed shook again.

‘I don’t see that I have any right to interfere,’ said Mr. Hatchard, after he had quieted the bedstead. ‘He’s your lodger.’

‘You’re my husband,’ said Mrs. Hatchard.

‘Ho!’ said Mr. Hatchard. ‘You’ve remembered that at last, have you?’

‘Yes, Alfred,’ said his wife.

‘And are you sorry for all your bad behaviour?’ demanded Mr. Hatchard.

Mrs. Hatchard hesitated. Then a clatter of fire-irons downstairs moved her to speech.

‘Ye-yes,’ she sobbed.

‘And you want me to take you back?’ queried the generous Mr. Hatchard.

‘Ye-ye-yes,’ said his wife.

Mr. Hatchard got out of bed and striking a match lit the candle, and, taking his overcoat from a peg behind the door, put it on and marched downstairs. Mrs. Hatchard, still trembling, followed behind.

‘What’s all this?’ he demanded, throwing the door open with a flourish.

Mr. Sadler, still holding the fire-shovel sceptre-fashion and still with the paper cap on his head, opened his mouth to reply. Then, as he saw the unkempt figure of Mr. Hatchard with the scared face of Mrs. Hatchard peeping over his shoulder, his face

grew red, his eyes watered, and his cheeks swelled.

‘K-K-K-Kch !      K-Kch !’ he said explosively.

‘Talk English, not Chinese,’ said Mr. Hatchard sternly.

Mr. Sadler threw down the fire-shovel, and to Mr. Hatchard’s great annoyance clapped his open hand over his mouth and spluttered with merriment.

‘When you’ve done playing at steam-engines,’ said Mr. Hatchard grimly.

‘Sh-sh-she—she——’ said Mr. Sadler.

‘That’ll do,’ said Mr. Hatchard hastily, with a warning frown.

‘Kow-towed to me,’ gurgled Mr. Sadler. ‘You ought to have seen it, Alf. I shall never get over it—never. It’s—no—no good winking at me ; I can’t help myself.’

He put his handkerchief to his eyes and leaned back exhausted. When he removed it, he found himself alone and everything still but for a murmur of voices overhead. Anon steps sounded on the stairs, and Mr. Hatchard, grave of face, entered the room.

‘Outside !’ he said briefly.

‘What !’ said the astounded Mr. Sadler. ‘Why, it’s eleven o’clock.’

‘I can’t help it if it’s twelve o’clock,’ was the

## HOMeward BOUND

reply. ' You shouldn't play the fool and spoil things by laughing. Now, are you going, or have I got to put you out ? '

He crossed the room, and, putting his hand on the shoulder of the protesting Mr. Sadler, pushed him into the passage, and taking his coat from the peg, held it up for him. Mr. Sadler, abandoning himself to his fate, got into it slowly and indulged in a few remarks on the subject of ingratitude.

' I can't help it,' said his friend, in a low voice. ' I've had to swear I've never seen you before.'

' Eh ? ' said the staring Mr. Sadler, shivering at the open door, ' does she believe you ? '

' No,' said Mr. Hatchard slowly, ' but she pretends to.'

## V. THE CAPTAIN'S EXPLOIT

IT was a wet, dreary night in that cheerless part of the great metropolis known as Wapping. The rain, which had been falling heavily for hours, still fell steadily on to the sloppy pavements and roads, and joining forces in the gutter, rushed impetuously to the nearest sewer. The two or three streets which had wedged themselves in between the docks and the river, and which, as a matter of fact, really comprise the beginning and end of Wapping, were deserted, except for a belated van crashing over the granite roads, or the chance form of a dock-labourer plodding doggedly along, with head bent in distaste for the rain, and hands sunk in trousers-pockets.

‘Beastly night,’ said Captain Bing, as he rolled out of the private bar of the ‘Sailor’s Friend’, and, ignoring the presence of the step, took a little hurried run across the pavement. ‘Not fit for a dog to be out in.’

He kicked, as he spoke, at a shivering cur which was looking in at the crack of the bar door, with a hazy view of calling its attention to the matter, and then, pulling up the collar of his rough pea-jacket, stepped boldly out into

## THE CAPTAIN'S EXPLOIT

the rain. Three or four minutes' walk, or rather roll, brought him to a dark, narrow passage, which ran between two houses to the waterside. By a slight tack to starboard at a critical moment he struck the channel safely, and followed it until it ended in a flight of old stone steps, half of which were under water.

'Where for?' inquired a man, starting up from a small penthouse formed of rough pieces of board.

'Schooner in the tier, *Smiling Jane*,' said the captain gruffly, as he stumbled clumsily into a boat and sat down in the stern. 'Why don't you have better seats in this 'ere boat?'

'They're there, if you'll look for them,' said the waterman; 'and you'll find 'em easier sitting than that bucket.'

'Why don't you put 'em where a man can see 'em?' inquired the captain, raising his voice a little.

The other opened his mouth to reply, but realizing that it would lead to a long and utterly futile argument, contented himself with asking his fare to trim the boat better; and, pushing off from the steps, pulled strongly through the dark, lumpy water. The tide was strong, so that they made but slow progress.

'When I was a young man,' said the fare

with severity, 'I'd ha' pulled this boat across and back afore now.'

'When you was a young man,' said the man at the oars, who had a local reputation as a wit, 'there wasn't no boats; they was all Noah's arks then.'

'Stow your gab,' said the captain, after a pause of deep thought.

The other, whose besetting sin was certainly not loquacity, ejected a thin stream of tobacco-juice over the side, spat on his hands, and continued his laborious work until a crowd of dark shapes, surmounted by a network of rigging, loomed up before them.

'Now, which is your little barge?' he inquired, tugging strongly to maintain his position against the fast-flowing tide.

'*Smiling Jane*,' said his fare.

'Ah,' said the waterman, '*Smiling Jane*, is it? You sit there, cap'n, an' I'll row round all their sterns while you strike matches and look at the names. We'll have quite a nice little evening.'

'There she is,' cried the captain, who was too muddled to notice the sarcasm; 'there's the little beauty. Steady, my lad.'

He reached out his hand as he spoke, and as the boat jarred violently against a small schooner, seized a rope which hung over the

side, and, swaying to and fro, fumbled in his pocket for the fare.

‘Steady, old boy,’ said the waterman affectionately. He had just received twopence-halfpenny and a shilling by mistake for three-pence. ‘Easy up the side. You ain’t such a pretty figger as you was when your old woman made such a bad bargain.’

The captain paused in his climb, and poising himself on one foot, gingerly felt for his tormentor’s head with the other. Not finding it, he flung his leg over the bulwark and gained the deck of the vessel as the boat swung round with the tide and disappeared in the darkness.

‘All turned in,’ said the captain, gazing owlishly at the deserted deck. ‘Well, there’s a good hour an’ a half afore we start ; I’ll turn in too.’

He walked slowly aft, and sliding back the companion-hatch, descended into a small, evil-smelling cabin, and stood feeling in the darkness for the matches. They were not to be found, and, growling profanely, he felt his way to the state-room, and turned in all standing.

It was still dark when he awoke, and hanging over the edge of the bunk cautiously felt for the floor with his feet, and having found it, stood thoughtfully scratching his head, which seemed to have swollen to abnormal proportions.

‘Time they were getting under way,’ he said at length, and groping his way to the foot of the steps he opened the door of what looked like a small pantry, but which was really the mate’s boudoir.

‘Jem,’ said the captain gruffly.

There was no reply, and jumping to the conclusion that he was above, the captain tumbled up the steps and gained the deck, which, as far as he could see, was in the same deserted condition as when he left it. Anxious to get some idea of the time, he staggered to the side and looked over. The tide was almost at the turn, and the steady clank, clank of neighbouring windlasses showed that other craft were just getting under way. A barge, its red light turning the water to blood, with a huge wall of dark sail, passed noiselessly by, the indistinct figure of a man leaning skilfully upon the tiller.

As these various signs of life and activity obtruded themselves upon the skipper of the *Smiling Jane*, his wrath rose higher and higher as he looked around the wet, deserted deck of his own little craft. Then he walked forward and thrust his head down the forecastle hatchway.

As he expected, there was a complete sleeping chorus below ; the deep satisfied snoring of

## THE CAPTAIN'S EXPLOIT

half a dozen seamen, who, regardless of the tide and their captain's feelings, were slumbering sweetly, in blissful ignorance of all that the *Lancet* might say upon the twin subjects of overcrowding and ventilation.

'Below there, you lazy thieves!' roared the captain; 'tumble up, tumble up!'

The snores stopped. 'Aye, aye!' said a sleepy voice. 'What's the matter, master?'

'Matter!' repeated the other, choking violently. 'Ain't you going to sail to-night?'

'To-night!' said another voice, in surprise. 'Why, I thought we wasn't going to sail till Wen'sday.'

Not trusting himself to reply, so careful was he of the morals of his men, the skipper went and leaned over the side and communed with the silent water. In an incredibly short space of time five or six dusky figures pattered up on to the deck, and a minute or two later the harsh clank of the windlass echoed far and wide.

The captain took the wheel. A fat and very sleepy seaman put up the side-lights, and the little schooner, detaching itself by the aid of boat-hooks and fenders from the neighbouring craft, moved slowly down with the tide. The men, in response to the captain's fervent orders, climbed aloft, and sail after sail was spread to the gentle breeze.

‘ Hi ! you there,’ cried the captain to one of the men who stood near him, coiling up some loose line.

‘ Sir ? ’ said the man.

‘ Where is the mate ? ’ inquired the captain.

‘ Man with red whiskers and pimply nose ? ’ said the man interrogatively.

‘ That’s him to a hair,’ answered the other.

‘ Ain’t seen him since he took me on at eleven,’ said the man.

‘ How many new hands are there ? ’

‘ I b’leeve we’re all fresh,’ was the reply. ‘ I don’t believe some of ’em have ever smelt salt water afore.’

‘ The mate’s been at it again,’ said the captain warmly, ‘ that’s what he has. He’s done it afore and got left behind. Them what can’t stand drink, my man, shouldn’t take it. Remember that.’

‘ He said we wasn’t going to sail till Wen’s-day,’ remarked the man, who found the captain’s attitude rather trying.

‘ He’ll get sacked, that’s what he’ll get,’ said the captain warmly. ‘ I shall report him as soon as I get ashore.’

The subject exhausted, the seaman returned to his work, and the captain continued steering in moody silence.

Slowly, slowly darkness gave way to light.

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The different portions of the craft, instead of all being blurred into one, took upon themselves shape, and stood out wet and distinct in the cold grey of the breaking day. But the lighter it became, the harder the skipper stared and rubbed his eyes, and looked from the deck to the flat, marshy shore, and from the shore back to the deck again.

‘Here, come here,’ he cried, beckoning to one of the crew.

‘Yessir,’ said the man, advancing.

‘There’s something in one of my eyes,’ faltered the skipper. ‘I can’t see straight; everything seems mixed up. Now, speaking deliberate and without any hurry, which side o’ the ship do you say the cook’s galley’s on?’

‘Starboard,’ said the man promptly, eyeing him with astonishment.

‘Starboard,’ repeated the other softly. ‘He says starboard, and that’s what it seems to me. My lad, yesterday morning it was on the port side.’

The seaman received this astounding communication with calmness, but, as a slight concession to appearances, said ‘Lor’!’

‘And the water-cask,’ said the skipper; ‘what colour is it?’

‘Green,’ said the man.

‘ Not white ? ’ inquired the skipper, leaning heavily upon the wheel.

‘ Whitish-green,’ said the man, who always believed in keeping in with his superior officers. The captain swore at him.

By this time two or three of the crew who had overheard part of the conversation had collected aft, and now stood in a small, wondering knot before their strange captain.

‘ My lads,’ said the latter, moistening his dry lips with his tongue, ‘ I name no names—I don’t know ’em yet—and I cast no suspicions, but somebody has been painting up and altering this ’ere craft, and twisting things about until a man ’ud hardly know her. Now what’s the little game ? ’

There was no answer, and the captain who was seeing things clearer and clearer in the growing light, got paler and paler.

‘ I must be going crazy,’ he muttered. ‘ Is this the *Smiling Jane*, or am I dreaming ? ’

‘ It ain’t the *Smiling Jane*,’ said one of the seamen ; ‘ leastways,’ he added cautiously, ‘ it wasn’t when I came aboard.’

‘ Not the *Smiling Jane* ! ’ roared the skipper ; ‘ what is it, then ? ’

‘ Why, the *Mary Ann*,’ chorused the astonished crew.

‘ My lads, faltered the agonized captain,

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after a long pause. 'My lads——' He stopped and swallowed something in his throat. 'I've been and brought away the wrong ship,' he continued with an effort; 'that's what I've done. I must have been bewitched.'

'Well, who's having the little game now?' inquired a voice.

'Somebody else'll be sacked as well as the mate,' said another.

'We must take her back,' said the captain, raising his voice to drown these mutterings. 'Stand by there!'

The bewildered crew went to their posts, the captain gave his orders in a voice which had never been so subdued and mellow since it broke at the age of fourteen, and the *Mary Ann* took in sail, and, dropping her anchor, waited patiently for the turning of the tide.

. . . . .

The church bells in Wapping and Rotherhithe were just striking the hour of midday, though they were heard by few above the noisy din of workers on wharves and ships, as a short, stout captain, and a mate with red whiskers and a pimply nose, stood up in a waterman's boat in the centre of the river, and gazed at each other in blank astonishment.

‘She’s gone, clean gone!’ murmured the bewildered captain.

‘Clean as a whistle,’ said the mate. ‘The new hands must ha’ run away with her.’

Then the bereaved captain raised his voice, and pronounced a pathetic and beautiful eulogy upon the departed vessel, somewhat marred by an appendix in which he consigned the new hands, their heirs and descendants, to everlasting perdition.

‘Ahoy!’ said the waterman, who was getting tired of the business, addressing a grimy-looking seaman hanging meditatively over the side of a schooner. ‘Where’s the *Mary Ann*?’

‘Went away at half-past one this morning,’ was the reply.

‘’Cos here’s the cap’n an’ the mate,’ said the waterman, indicating the forlorn couple with a bob of his head.

‘My eye!’ said the man. ‘I s’pose the cook’s in charge then. We was to have gone too, but our old man hasn’t turned up.’

Quickly the news spread amongst the craft in the tier, and many and various were the suggestions shouted to the bewildered couple from the different decks. At last, just as the captain had ordered the waterman to return

## THE CAPTAIN'S EXPLOIT

to the shore, he was startled by a loud cry from the mate.

‘ Look there ! ’ he shouted.

The captain looked. Fifty or sixty yards away a small shamefaced-looking schooner, so it appeared to his excited imagination, was slowly approaching them. A minute later a shout went up from the other craft as she took in sail and bore slowly down upon them. Then a small boat put off to the buoy, and the *Mary Ann* was slowly warped into the place she had left ten hours before.

But while all this was going on she was boarded by her captain and mate. They were met by Captain Bing, supported by *his* mate, who had hastily pushed off from the *Smiling Jane* to the assistance of his chief. In the two leading features before mentioned he was not unlike the mate of the *Mary Ann*, and much stress was laid upon this fact by the unfortunate Bing in his explanation. So much so, in fact, that both the mates got restless ; the skipper, who was a plain man, and given to calling a spade a spade, using the word ‘ pimply ’ with what seemed to them unnecessary iteration.

It is possible that the interview might have lasted for hours had not Bing suddenly changed his tactics and begun to throw out dark hints about standing a dinner ashore, and settling it

over a friendly glass. The face of the *Mary Ann's* captain began to clear, and, as Bing proceeded from generalities to details, a soft smile played over his expressive features. It was reflected in the faces of the mates, who by these means showed clearly that they understood the table was to be laid for four.

At this happy turn of affairs Bing himself smiled, and a little while later a ship's boat containing four boon companions put off from the *Mary Ann* and made for the shore. Of what afterwards ensued there is no distinct record, beyond what may be gleaned from the fact that the quartet turned up at midnight arm-in-arm, and affectionately refused to be separated—even to enter the ship's boat, which was waiting for them. The sailors were at first rather nonplussed, but by dint of much coaxing and argument broke up the party, and rowing them to their respective vessels, put them carefully to bed.

## VI. IN THE FAMILY

**T**HE oldest inhabitant of Claybury sat beneath the sign of the 'Cauliflower' and gazed with affectionate, but dim, old eyes in the direction of the village street.

'No ; Claybury men ain't never been much of ones for emigrating,' he said, turning to the youthful traveller who was resting in the shade with a mug of ale and a cigarette. 'They know they'd 'ave to go a long way afore they'd find a place as 'ud come up to this.'

He finished the tablespoonful of beer in his mug and sat for so long with his head back and the inverted vessel on his face that the traveller, who at first thought it was the beginning of a conjuring trick, coloured furiously, and asked permission to refill it.

Now and then a Claybury man has gone to foreign parts, said the old man, drinking from the replenished mug and placing it where the traveller could mark progress without undue strain ; but they've, gen'rally speaking, come back and wished as they'd never gone.

The on'y man as I ever heard of that made his fortune by emigrating was Henery Walker's great-uncle, Josiah Walker by name, and he

wasn't a Claybury man at all. He made his fortune out o' sheep in Australey, and he was so rich and well-to-do that he could never find time to answer the letters that Henery Walker used to send him when he was hard up.

Henery Walker used to hear of 'im through a relation of his up in London, and tell us all about 'im and his money up at this here 'Cauliflower' public-house. And he used to sit and drink his beer and wonder who would 'ave the old man's money arter he was dead.

When the relation in London died Henery Walker left off hearing about his uncle, and he got so worried over thinking that the old man might die and leave his money to strangers that he got quite thin. He talked of emigrating to Australey 'imself, and then, acting on the advice of Bill Chambers—who said it was a cheaper thing to do—he wrote to his uncle instead, and, arter reminding 'im that 'e was an old man living in a strange country, 'e asked 'im to come to Claybury and make his 'ome with 'is loving grand-nephew.

It was a good letter, because more than one gave 'im a hand with it, and there was little bits o' Scripture in it to make it more solemn-like. It was wrote on pink paper with pie-crust edges and put in a green envelope, and Bill

## IN THE FAMILY

Chambers said a man must 'ave a 'art of stone if that didn't touch it.

Four months arterwards Henery Walker got an answer to 'is letter from 'is great-uncle. It was a nice letter, and, arter thanking Henery Walker for all his kindness, 'is uncle said that he was getting an old man, and p'r'aps he should come and lay 'is bones in England arter all, and if he did 'e should certainly come and see his grand-nephew, Henery Walker.

Most of us thought Henery Walker's fortune was as good as made, but Bob Pretty, a nasty, low, poaching chap that has done wot he could to give Claybury a bad name, turned up his nose at it.

'I'll believe he's coming 'ome when I see him,' he ses. 'It's my belief he went to Australey to get out o' your way, Henery.'

'As it 'appened he went there afore I was born,' ses Henery Walker, firing up.

'He knew your father,' ses Bob Pretty, 'and he didn't want to take no risks.'

They 'ad words then, and arter that every time Bob Pretty met 'im he asked arter his great-uncle's 'ealth, and used to pretend to think 'e was living with 'im.

'You ought to get the old gentleman out a bit more, Henery,' he would say ; 'it can't be

good for 'im to be shut up in the 'ouse so much—especially your 'ouse.'

Henery Walker used to get that riled he didn't know wot to do with 'imself, and as time went on, and he began to be afraid that 'is uncle never would come back to England, he used to get quite nasty if anybody on'y so much as used the word 'uncle' in 'is company.

It was over six months since he 'ad had the letter from 'is uncle, and 'e was up here at the 'Cauliflower' with some more of us one night, when Dicky Weed, the tailor, turns to Bob Pretty and he ses, 'Who's the old gentleman that's staying with you, Bob?'

Bob Pretty puts down 'is beer very careful and turns round on 'im.

'Old gentleman?' he ses, very slow. 'Wot are you talking about?'

'I mean the little old gentleman with white whiskers and a squeaky voice,' ses Dicky Weed.

'You've been dreaming,' ses Bob, taking up 'is beer ag'in.

'I see 'im too, Bob,' ses Bill Chambers.

'Ho, you did, did you?' ses Bob Pretty, putting down 'is mug with a bang. 'And wot d'ye mean by coming spying round my place, eh? Wot d'ye mean by it?'

'Spying?' ses Bill Chambers, gaping at 'im

with 'is mouth open ; ' I wasn't spying. Any-one 'ud think you 'ad done something you was ashamed of.'

' You mind your business and I'll mind mine,' ses Bob, very fierce.

' I was passing the 'ouse,' ses Bill Chambers, looking round at us, ' and I see an old man's face at the bedroom winder, and while I was wondering who 'e was a hand come and drawed 'im away. I see 'im as plain as ever I see anything in my life, and the hand, too. Big and dirty it was.'

' And he's got a cough,' ses Dicky Weed—' a churchyard cough—I 'eard it.'

' It ain't much you don't hear, Dicky,' ses Bob Pretty, turning on 'im ; ' the on'y thing you never did 'ear, and never will 'ear, is any good of yourself.'

He kicked over a chair wot was in 'is way and went off in such a temper as we'd never seen 'im in afore, and, wot was more surprising still, but I know it's true, 'cos I drunk it up myself, he'd left over arf a pint o' beer in 'is mug.

' He's up to something,' ses Sam Jones, staring arter him ; ' mark my words.'

We couldn't make head nor tail out of it, but for some days arterward you'd ha' thought that Bob Pretty's 'ouse was a peep-show. Everybody stared at the winders as they went by,

and the children played in front of the 'ouse and stared in all day long. Then the old gentleman was seen one day as bold as brass sitting at the winder, and we heard that it was a pore old tramp Bob Pretty 'ad met on the road and given a home to, and he didn't like 'is good-'artedness to be known for fear he should be made fun of.

Nobody believed that, o' course, and things got more puzzling than ever. Once or twice the old gentleman went out for a walk, but Bob Pretty or 'is missis was always with 'im, and if anybody tried to speak to him they always said 'e was deaf and took him off as fast as they could. Then one night up at the 'Cauliflower' here Dicky Weed came rushing in with a bit o' news that took everybody's breath away.

'I've just come from the post office,' he ses, 'and there's a letter for Bob Pretty's old gentleman! Wot d'ye think o' that?'

'If you could tell us wot's inside it you might 'ave something to brag about,' ses Henery Walker.

'I don't want to see the inside,' ses Dicky Weed; 'the name on the outside was good enough for me. I couldn't hardly believe my own eyes, but there it was: 'Mr. Josiah Walker,' as plain as the nose on your face.'

## IN THE FAMILY

O' course, we see it all then, and wondered why we hadn't thought of it afore ; and we stood quiet listening to the things that Henery Walker said about a man that would go and steal another man's great-uncle from 'im. Three times Smith, the landlord, said, '*Hush !*' and the fourth time he put Henery Walker outside and told 'im to stay there till he 'ad lost his voice.

Henery Walker stayed outside five minutes, and then 'e come back in ag'in to ask for advice. His idea seemed to be that, as the old gentleman was deaf, Bob Pretty was passing 'isself off as Henery Walker, and the disgrace was a'most more than 'e could bear. He began to get excited ag'in, and Smith 'ad just said '*Hush !*' once more when we 'eard somebody whistling outside, and in come Bob Pretty.

He 'ad hardly got 'is face in at the door afore Henery Walker started on 'im, and Bob Pretty stood there, struck all of a heap, and staring at 'im as though he couldn't believe his ears.

' 'Ave you gone mad, Henery ? ' he ses at last.

' Give me back my great-uncle,' ses Henery Walker, at the top of 'is voice.

Bob Pretty shook his 'ead at him. ' I haven't got your great-uncle, Henery,' he ses, very gentle. ' I know the name is the same,

but wot of it? There's more than one Josiah Walker in the world. This one is no relation to you at all; he's a very respectable old gentleman.'

'I'll go and ask 'im,' ses Henery Walker, getting up, 'and I'll tell 'im wot sort o' man you are, Bob Pretty.'

'He's gone to bed now, Henery,' ses Bob Pretty.

'I'll come in the fust thing to-morrow morning, then,' ses Henery Walker.

'Not in my 'ouse, Henery,' ses Bob Pretty; 'not arter the things you've been sayin' about me. I'm a pore man, but I've got my pride. Besides, I tell you he ain't your uncle. He's a pore old man I'm giving a 'ome to, and I won't 'ave 'im worried.'

'Ow much does 'e pay you a week, Bob?' ses Bill Chambers.

Bob Pretty pretended not to hear 'im.

'Where did your wife get the money to buy that bonnet she 'ad on on Sunday?' ses Bill Chambers. 'My wife ses it's the fust new bonnet she has 'ad since she was married.'

'And where did the new winder-curtains come from?' ses Peter Gubbins.

Bob Pretty drank up 'is beer and stood looking at them very thoughtful; then he opened the door and went out without saying a word.

'He's got your great-uncle a prisoner in his 'ouse, Henery,' ses Bill Chambers ; 'it's easy for to see that the pore old gentleman is getting past things, and I shouldn't wonder if Bob Pretty don't make 'im leave all 'is money to 'im.'

Henery Walker started raving ag'in, and for the next few days he tried his 'ardest to get a few words with 'is great-uncle, but Bob Pretty was too much for 'im. Everybody in Claybury said wot a shame it was, but it was all no good, and Henery Walker used to leave 'is work and stand outside Bob Pretty's for hours at a time in the 'opes of getting a word with the old man.

He got 'is chance at last, in quite a unexpected way. We was up 'ere at the 'Cauliflower' one evening, and, as it 'appened, we was talking about Henery Walker's great-uncle, when the door opened, and who should walk in but the old gentleman 'imself. Everybody left off talking and stared at 'im, but he walked up to the bar and ordered a glass 'o gin and beer as comfortable as you please.

Bill Chambers was the fust to get 'is presence of mind back, and he set off arter Henery Walker as fast as 'is legs could carry 'im, and in a wunnerful short time, considering, he came back with Henery, both of 'em puffing and blowing their 'ardest.

‘ There—he—is ! ’ ses Bill Chambers, pointing to the old gentleman.

Henery Walker gave one look, and then ’e slipped over to the old man and stood all of a tremble, smiling at ’im. “Good evening,” he ses.

‘ Wot ? ’ ses the old gentleman.

‘ Good evening ! ’ ses Henery Walker ag’in.

‘ I’m a bit deaf,’ ses the old gentleman, putting his ’and to his ear.

‘ GOOD EVENING ! ’ ses Henery Walker ag’in, shouting. ‘ I’m your grand-nephew, Henery Walker ! ’

‘ Ho, are you ? ’ ses the old gentleman, not at all surprised. ‘ Bob Pretty was telling me all about you.’

‘ I ’ope you didn’t listen to ’im,’ ses Henery Walker, all of a tremble. ‘ Bob Pretty’d say anything except his prayers.’

‘ He ses you’re arter my money,’ ses the old gentleman, looking at ’im.

‘ He’s a liar, then,’ ses Henery Walker ; ‘ he’s arter it ’imself. And it ain’t a respectable place for you to stay at. Anybody’ll tell you wot a rascal Bob Pretty is. Why, he’s a by-word.”

‘ Everybody is arter my money,’ ses the old gentleman, looking round. ‘ Everybody.’

‘ I ’ope you’ll know me better afore you’ve

*M. Sullivan*

## IN THE FAMILY

done with me, uncle,' ses Henery Walker, taking a seat alongside of 'im. ' Will you 'ave another mug o' beer? '

' Gin and beer,' ses the old gentleman, cocking his eye up very fierce at Smith, the landlord; ' and mind the gin don't get out ag'in, same as it did in the last.'

Smith asked 'im wot he meant, but 'is deafness come on ag'in. Henery Walker 'ad an extra dose o' gin put in, and arter he 'ad tasted it the old gentleman seemed to get more amiable-like, and 'im and Henery Walker sat by theirselves talking quite comfortable.

' Why not come and stay with me? ' ses Henery Walker at last. ' You can do as you please and have the best of everything.'

' Bob Pretty ses you're arter my money,' ses the old gentleman, shaking his 'ead. ' I couldn't trust you.'

' He ses that to put you ag'in me,' ses Henery Walker, pleading-like.

' Well, wot do you want me to come and live with you for, then? ' ses old Mr. Walker.

' Because you're my great-uncle,' ses Henery Walker, ' and my 'ouse is the proper place for you. Blood is thicker than water.'

' And you don't want my money? ' ses the old man, looking at 'im very sharp.

' Certainly not,' ses Henery Walker.

‘ And ’ow much ’ave I got to pay a week ? ’  
ses old Mr. Walker. ‘ That’s the question ? ’

‘ Pay ? ’ ses Henery Walker, speaking afore  
he ’ad time to think. ‘ Pay ? Why, I don’t  
want you to pay anything.’

The old gentleman said as ’ow he’d think it  
over, and Henery started to talk to ’im about  
his father and an old aunt named Maria, but  
’e stopped ’im sharp, and said he was sick and  
tired of the whole Walker family, and didn’t  
want to ’ear their names ag’in as long as he  
lived. Henery Walker began to talk about  
Australey then, and asked ’im ’ow many sheep  
he’d got, and the words was ’ardly out of ’is  
mouth afore the old gentleman stood up and  
said he was arter his money ag’in.

Henery Walker at once gave ’im some  
more gin and beer, and arter he ’ad drunk it  
the old gentleman said that he’d go and live  
with ’im for a little while to see ’ow he  
liked it.

‘ But I sha’n’t pay anything,’ he ses, very  
sharp ; ‘ mind that.’

‘ I wouldn’t take it if you offered it to me,’  
ses Henery Walker. ‘ You’ll come straight  
’ome with me to-night, won’t you ? ’

Afore old Mr. Walker could answer, the door  
opened and in came Bob Pretty. He gave one  
look at Henery Walker and then he walked

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straight over to the old gentleman and put his 'and on his shoulder.

'Why, I've been looking for you everywhere, Mr. Walker,' he ses. 'I couldn't think wot had 'appened to you.'

'You needn't worry yourself, Bob,' ses Henery Walker; 'he is coming to live with me now.'

'Don't you believe it,' ses Bob Pretty, taking hold of old Mr. Walker by the arm; 'he's my lodger, and he's coming with me.'

He began to lead the old gentleman towards the door, but Henery Walker, wot was still sitting down, threw 'is arms round his legs and held 'im tight. Bob Pretty pulled one way and Henery Walker pulled the other, and both of 'em shouted to each other to leave go. The row they made was awful, but old Mr. Walker made more noise than the two of 'em put together.

'You leave go o' my lodger,' ses Bob Pretty.

'You leave go o' my great-uncle—my dear great-uncle,' ses Henery Walker, as the old gentleman called 'im a bad name and asked 'im whether he thought he was made of iron.

I believe they'd ha' been at it till closing-time, on'y Smith, the landlord, came running in from the back and told them to go outside.

He 'ad to shout to make 'imself heard, and all four of 'em seemed to be trying which could make the most noise.

'He's my lodger,' ses Bob Pretty, 'and he can't go without giving me proper notice; that's the lor—a week's notice.'

They all shouted ag'in then, and at last the old gentleman told Henery Walker to give Bob Pretty ten shillings for the week's notice, and ha' done with 'im. Henery Walker 'ad only got four shillings with 'im, but 'e borrowed the rest from Smith, and arter he 'ad told Bob Pretty wot he thought of 'im he took old Mr. Walker by the arm and led him 'ome a'most dancing for joy.


Mrs. Walker was nearly as pleased as wot 'e was, and the fuss they made of the old gentleman was sinful a'most. He 'ad to speak about it 'imself at last, and he told 'em plain that when 'e wanted arf a dozen sore-eyed children to be brought down in their night-gowns to kiss 'im while he was eating sausages, he'd say so.

Arter that Mrs. Walker was afraid that 'e might object when her and her 'usband gave up their bedroom to 'im; but he didn't. He took it all as 'is right, and when Henery Walker, who was sleeping in the next room with three of 'is boys, fell out o' bed for the

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second time, he got up and rapped on the wall.

Bob Pretty came round the next morning with a tin box that belonged to the old man, and 'e was so perlite and nice to 'im that Henery Walker could see that he 'ad 'opes of getting 'im back ag'in. The box was carried upstairs and put under old Mr. Walker's bed, and 'e was so partikler about its being locked, and about nobody being about when 'e opened it, that Mrs. Walker went arf out of her mind with curiosity.

'I s'pose you've looked to see that Bob Pretty didn't take anything out of it?' ses Henery Walker. 

'He didn't 'ave the chance,' ses the old gentleman. 'It's always kep' locked.'

'It's a box that looks as though it might 'ave been made in Australey,' ses Henery Walker, who was longing to talk about them parts.

'If you say another word about Australey to me,' ses old Mr. Walker, firing up, 'off I go. Mind that! You're arter my money, and if you're not careful you sha'n't 'ave a farthing of it.'

That was the last time the word 'Australey' passed Henery Walker's lips, and even when 'e saw his great-uncle writing letters there he didn't say anything. And the old man was so

suspicious of Mrs. Walker's curiosity that all the letters that was wrote to 'im he 'ad sent to Bob Pretty's. He used to call there pretty near every morning to see whether any 'ad come for 'im.

In three months Henery Walker 'adn't seen the colour of 'is money once, and, wot was worse still, he took to giving Henery's things away. Mrs. Walker 'ad been complaining for some time of 'ow bad the hens had been laying, and one morning at breakfast-time she told her 'usband that, besides missing eggs, two of 'er best hens 'ad been stolen in the night.

'They wasn't stolen,' ses old Mr. Walker, putting down 'is teacup. 'I took 'em round this morning and give 'em to Bob Pretty.'

'Give 'em to Bob Pretty?' ses Henery Walker, arf choking. 'Wot for?'

'Cos he asked me for 'em,' ses the old gentleman. 'Wot are you looking at me like that for?'

Henery couldn't answer 'im, and the old gentleman, looking very fierce, got up from the table and told Mrs. Walker to give 'im his hat. Henery Walker clung to 'im with tears in his eyes a'most and begged 'im not to go, and arter a lot of talk old Mr. Walker said he'd look over it this time, but it mustn't occur ag'in.

Arter that 'e did as 'e liked with Henery

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Walker's things, and Henery dursen't say a word to 'im. Bob Pretty used to come up and flatter 'im and beg 'im to go back and lodge with 'im, and Henery was so afraid he'd go that he didn't say a word when old Mr. Walker used to give Bob Pretty things to make up for 'is disappointment. He 'eard on the quiet from Bill Chambers, who said that the old man 'ad told it to Bob Pretty as a dead secret, that 'e 'ad left 'im all his money, and he was ready to put up with anything.

The old man must ha' been living with Henery Walker for over eighteen months when one night he passed away in 'is sleep. Henery knew that his 'art was wrong, because he 'ad just paid Dr. Green 'is bill for saying that 'e couldn't do anything for 'im, but it was a surprise to 'im all the same. He blew his nose 'ard and Mrs. Walker kept rubbing 'er eyes with her apron while they talked in whispers and wondered 'ow much money they 'ad come in for.

In less than ten minutes the news was all over Claybury, and arf the people in the place hanging round in front of the 'ouse waiting to hear 'ow much the Walkers 'ad come in for. Henery Walker pulled the blind on one side for a moment and shook his 'ead at them to go away. Some of them did go back a yard or two,

and then they stood staring at Bob Pretty, wot come up as bold as brass and knocked at the door.

‘Wot’s this I ’ear?’ he ses, when Henery Walker opened it. ‘You don’t mean to tell me that the pore old gentleman has really gone? I told ’im wot would happen if ’e came to lodge with you.’

‘You be off,’ ses Henery Walker; ‘he hasn’t left you anything.’

‘I know that,’ ses Bob Pretty, shaking his ’ead. ‘You’re welcome to it, Henery, if there is anything. I never bore any malice to you for taking of ’im away from us. I could see you’d took a fancy to ’im from the fust. The way you pretended ’e was your great-uncle showed me that.’

‘Wot are you talking about?’ ses Henery Walker. ‘He *was* my great-uncle!’

‘Have it your own way, Henery,’ ses Bob Pretty; ‘on’y, if you asked me, I should say that he was my wife’s grandfather.’

‘*Your—wife’s—grandfather?*’ ses Henery Walker, in a choking voice.

He stood staring at ’im, stupid-like, for a minute or two, but he couldn’t get out another word. In a flash ’e saw ’ow he’d been done, and how Bob Pretty ’ad been deceiving ’im all along, and the idea that he ’ad arf ruined

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himself keeping Mrs. Pretty's grandfather for 'em pretty near sent 'im out of his mind.

'But how is it 'is name was Josiah Walker, same as Henery's great-uncle?' ses Bill Chambers, who 'ad been crowding round with the others. 'Tell me that!'

'He 'ad a fancy for it,' ses Bob Pretty, 'and being a 'armless amusement we let him 'ave his own way. I told Henery Walker over and over ag'in that it wasn't his uncle, but he wouldn't believe me. I've got witnesses to it. Wot did you say, Henery?'

Henery Walker drew 'imself up as tall as he could and stared at him. Twice he opened 'is mouth to speak but couldn't, and then he made a odd sort o' choking noise in his throat, and slammed the door in Bob Pretty's face.

## VII. THE BOATSWAIN'S WATCH

CAPTAIN POLSON sat in his comfortable parlour smiling benignly upon his daughter and sister. His ship, after an absence of eighteen months, was once more berthed in the small harbour of Barborough, and the captain was sitting in that state of good-natured affability which invariably characterized his first appearance after a long absence.

‘No news this end, I suppose,’ he inquired, after a lengthy recital of most extraordinarily uninteresting adventures.

‘Not much,’ said his sister Jane, looking nervously at her niece. ‘Young Metcalfe has gone into partnership with his father.’

‘I don’t want to hear about those sharks,’ said the captain, waxing red. ‘Tell me about honest men.’

‘Joe Lewis has had a month’s imprisonment for stealing fowls,’ said Miss Polson meekly. ‘Mrs. Purton has had twins—dear little fellows they are, fat as butter!—she has named one of them Polson, after you. The greedy one.’

‘Any deaths?’ inquired the captain snappishly, as he eyed the innocent lady suspiciously.

‘Poor old Jasper Wheeler has gone,’ said his

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sister ; ' he was very resigned. He borrowed enough money to get a big doctor from London, and when he heard that there was no hope for him he said he was just longing to go, and he was sorry he couldn't take all his dear ones with him. Mary Hewson is married to Jack Draper, and young Metcalfe's banns go up for the third time next Sunday.'

' I hope he gets a Tartar,' said the vindictive captain. ' Who's the girl ? Some silly little fool, I know. She ought to be warned ! '

' I don't believe in interfering in marriages,' said his daughter Chrissie, shaking her head sagely.

' Oh ! ' said the captain, staring, '*you* don't ! Now you've put your hair up and taken to wearing long frocks, I suppose you're beginning to think of it.'

' Yes ; auntie wants to tell you something ! ' said his daughter, rising and crossing the room.

' No, I don't ! ' said Miss Polson hastily.

' You'd better do it,' said Chrissie, giving her a little push, ' there's a dear ; I'll go upstairs and lock myself in my room.'

The face of the captain, whilst this conversation was passing, was a study in suppressed emotions. He was a firm advocate for importing the manners of the quarter-deck into private life, the only drawback being that he

had to leave behind him the language usual in that locality. To this omission he usually ascribed his failures.

‘Sit down, Chrissie,’ he commanded ; ‘sit down, Jane. Now, miss, what’s all this about?’

‘I don’t like to tell you,’ said Chrissie, folding her hands in her lap. ‘I know you’ll be cross. You’re so unreasonable.’

The captain stared—frightfully.

‘I’m going to be married,’ said Chrissie suddenly—‘there ! To Jack Metcalfe—there ! So you’ll have to learn to love him. He’s going to try and love you for my sake.’ To his sister’s dismay the captain got up, and brandishing his fists walked violently to and fro. By these simple but unusual means decorum was preserved.

‘If you were only a boy,’ said the captain, when he had regained his seat, ‘I should know what to do with you.’

‘If I were a boy,’ said Chrissie, who, having braced herself up for the fray, meant to go through with it, ‘I shouldn’t want to marry Jack. Don’t be silly, father !’

‘Jane,’ said the captain, in a voice which made the lady addressed start in her chair, ‘what do you mean by it?’

‘It isn’t my fault,’ said Miss Polson feebly. ‘I told her how it would be. And it was so

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gradual ; he admired my geraniums at first, and, of course, I was deceived. There are so many people admire my geraniums ; whether it is because the window has a south aspect——’

‘ Oh ! ’ said the captain rudely, ‘ that’ll do, Jane. If he wasn’t a lawyer, I’d go round and break his neck. Chrissie is only nineteen, and she’ll come for a year’s cruise with me. Perhaps the sea air’ll strengthen her head. We’ll see who’s master in this family.’

‘ I’m sure I don’t want to be master,’ said his daughter, taking a weapon of fine cambric out of her pocket, and getting ready for action. ‘ I can’t help liking people. Auntie likes him too ; don’t you, auntie ? ’

‘ Yes,’ said Miss Polson bravely.

‘ Very good,’ said the autocrat promptly, ‘ I’ll take you both for a cruise.’

‘ You’re making me very un-unhappy,’ said Chrissie, burying her face in her handkerchief.

‘ You’ll be more unhappy before I’ve done with you,’ said the captain grimly. ‘ And while I think of it, I’ll step round and stop those banns.’

His daughter caught him by the arm as he was passing, and laid her face on his sleeve. ‘ You’ll make me look so foolish,’ she wailed.

‘ That’ll make it easier for you to come to

sea with me,' said her father. 'Don't cry all over my sleeve. I'm going to see a parson. Run upstairs and play with your dolls, and if you're a good girl, I'll bring you in some sweets.' He put on his hat, and closing the front door with a bang, went off to the new rector to knock two years off the age which his daughter kept for purposes of matrimony. The rector, grieved at such duplicity in one so young, met him more than half-way, and he came out from him smiling placidly, until his attention was attracted by a young man on the other side of the road, who was regarding him with manifest awkwardness.

'Good evening, Captain Polson,' he said, crossing the road.

'Oh,' said the captain, stopping, 'I wanted to speak to you. I suppose you wanted to marry my daughter while I was out of the way, to save trouble. Just the manly thing I should have expected of you. I've stopped the banns, and I'm going to take her for a voyage with me. You'll have to look elsewhere, my lad.'

'The ill feeling is all on your side, captain,' said Metcalfe, reddening.

'Ill feeling!' snorted the captain. 'You put me in the witness-box, and made me a laughing-stock in the place with your silly attempts at jokes, lost me five hundred pounds,

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and then try and marry my daughter while I'm at sea. Ill feeling be hanged !'

'That was business,' said the other.

'It was,' said the captain, 'and this is business too. Mine. I'll look after it, I'll promise you. I think I know who'll look silly this time. I'd sooner see my girl in heaven than married to a rascal of a lawyer.'

'You'd want good glasses,' retorted Metcalfe, who was becoming ruffled.

'I don't want to bandy words with you,' said the captain with dignity, after a long pause, devoted to thinking of something worth bandying. 'You think you're a clever fellow, but I know a cleverer. You're quite welcome to marry my daughter—if you can.'

He turned on his heel, and refusing to listen to any further remarks went on his way rejoicing. Arrived home, he lit his pipe, and throwing himself into an arm-chair, related his exploits. Chrissie had recourse to her handkerchief again, more for effect than use, but Miss Polson, who was a tender soul, took hers out and wept unrestrainedly. At first the captain took it well enough. It was a tribute to his power, but when they took to sobbing one against the other, his temper rose, and he sternly commanded silence.

'I shall be like—this—every day at sea,'

sobbed Chrissie vindictively, 'only worse ; making us all ridiculous.'

'Stop that noise directly !' vociferated the captain.

'We c-c-can't,' sobbed Miss Polson.

'And we d-don't want to,' said Chrissie. 'It's all we can do, and we're going to do it. You'd better g-go out and stop something else. You can't stop us.'

The captain took the advice and went, and in the billiard-room of the 'George' heard some news which set him thinking, and which brought him back somewhat earlier than he had at first intended. A small group at his gate broke up into its elements at his approach, and the captain, following his sister and daughter into the room, sat down and eyed them severely.

'So you're going to run off to London to get married, are you, miss ?' he said ferociously. 'Well, we'll see. You don't go out of my sight until we sail, and if I catch that pettifogging lawyer round at my gate again I'll break every bone in his body, mind that.'

For the next three days the captain kept his daughter under observation, and never allowed her to stir abroad except in his company. The evening of the third day, to his own great surprise, he spent at a Dorcas. The company was

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not congenial, several of the ladies putting their work away, and glaring frigidly at the intruder ; and though they could see clearly that he was suffering greatly, made no attempt to put him at his ease. He was very thoughtful all the way home, and the next day took a partner into the concern, in the shape of his boatswain.

‘ You understand, Tucker,’ he concluded, as the hapless seaman stood in a cringing attitude before Chrissie, ‘ that you never let my daughter out of your sight. When she goes out you go with her.’

‘ Yessir,’ said Tucker ; ‘ and suppose she tells me to go home, what am I to do then ? ’

‘ You’re a fool,’ said the captain sharply. ‘ It doesn’t matter what she says or does ; unless you are in the same room, you are never to be more than three yards from her.’

‘ Make it four, cap’n,’ said the boatswain, in a broken voice.

‘ Three,’ said the captain ; ‘ and mind, she’s artful. All girls are, and she’ll try and give you the slip. I’ve had information given me as to what’s going on. Whatever happens, you are not to leave her.’

‘ I wish you’d get somebody else, sir,’ said Tucker, very respectfully. ‘ There’s a lot of chaps aboard that’d like the job.’

‘ You’re the only man I can trust,’ said the captain shortly. ‘ When I give you orders I know they’ll be obeyed ; it’s your watch now.’

He went out humming. Chrissie took up a book and sat down, utterly ignoring the woe-begone figure which stood the regulation three yards from her, twisting its cap in its hands.

‘ I hope, miss,’ said the boatswain, after standing patiently for three-quarters of an hour, ‘ as ’qw you won’t think I sought arter this ’ere little job.’

‘ No,’ said Chrissie, without looking up.

‘ I’m just obeying orders,’ continued the boatswain. ‘ I always git let in for these ’ere little jobs, somehow. The monkeys I’ve had to look arter aboard ship would frighten you. There never was a monkey on the *Monarch* but what I was in charge of. That’s what a man gets through being trustworthy.’

‘ Just so,’ said Chrissie, putting down her book. ‘ Well, I’m going into the kitchen now ; come along, nursie.’

‘ ’Ere, I say, miss ! ’ remonstrated Tucker, flushing.

‘ I don’t know how Susan will like you going in her kitchen,’ said Chrissie thoughtfully ; ‘ however, that’s your business.’

The unfortunate seaman followed his fair

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charge into the kitchen, and, leaning against the doorpost, doubled up like a limp rag before the terrible glance of its mistress.

‘Ho!’ said Susan, who took the state of affairs as an insult to the sex in general; ‘and what might you be wanting?’

‘Cap’n’s orders,’ murmured Tucker feebly.

‘I’m captain here,’ said Susan, confronting him with her bare arms akimbo.

‘And credit it does you,’ said the boatswain, looking round admiringly.

‘Is it your wish, Miss Chrissie, that this image comes and stalks into my kitchen as if the place belongs to him?’ demanded the irate Susan.

‘I didn’t mean to come in in that way,’ said the astonished Tucker. ‘I can’t help being big.’

‘I don’t want him here,’ said her mistress; ‘what do you think I want him for?’

‘You hear that?’ said Susan, pointing to the door; ‘now go. I don’t want people to say that you come into this kitchen after me.’

‘I’m here by the cap’n’s orders,’ said Tucker faintly. ‘I don’t want to be here—far from it. As for people saying that I come here after you, them as knows me would laugh at the idea.’

‘If I had my way,’ said Susan, in a hard,

rasping voice, 'I'd box your ears for you. That's what I'd do to you, and you can go and tell the cap'n I said so. Spy !'

This was the first verse of the first watch, and there were many verses. To add to his discomfort he was confined to the house, as his charge manifested no desire to go outside, and as neither she nor her aunt cared about the trouble of bringing him to a fit and proper state of subjection, the task became a labour of love for the energetic Susan. In spite of everything, however, he stuck to his guns, and the indignant Chrissie, who was in almost hourly communication with Metcalfe through the medium of her faithful handmaiden, was rapidly becoming desperate.

On the fourth day, time getting short, Chrissie went on a new tack with her keeper, and Susan, sorely against her will, had to follow suit. Chrissie smiled at him, Susan called him Mr. Tucker, and Miss Polson gave him a glass of her best wine. From the position of an outcast, he jumped in one bound to that of confidential adviser. Miss Polson told him many items of family interest, and later on in the afternoon actually consulted him as to a bad cold which Chrissie had developed.

He prescribed half a pint of linseed oil hot, but Miss Polson favoured chlorodyne. The

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conversation then turned on the deadly qualities of that drug when taken in excess, of the fatal sleep in which it lulled its victims. So disastrous were the incidents cited, that half an hour later, when, her aunt and Susan being out, Chrissie took a small bottle of chlorodyne from the mantelpiece, the boatswain implored her to try his nastier but safer remedy instead.

‘Nonsense!’ said Chrissie, ‘I’m only going to take twenty drops—one—two—three——’

The drug suddenly poured out in a little stream.

‘I should think that’s about it,’ said Chrissie, holding the tumbler up to the light.

‘It’s about five hundred!’ said the horrified Tucker. ‘Don’t take that, miss, whatever you do; let me measure it for you.’

The girl waved him away, and, before he could interfere, drank off the contents of the glass and resumed her seat. The boatswain watched her uneasily, and taking up the phial carefully read through the directions. After that he was not at all surprised to see the book fall from his charge’s hand on to the floor, and her eyes close.

‘I knowed it,’ said Tucker, in a profuse perspiration. ‘I knowed it. Them blamed gals are all alike. Always knows what’s best. Miss Polson! Miss Polson!’

He shook her roughly, but to no purpose, and then running to the door, shouted eagerly for Susan. No reply forthcoming he ran to the window, but there was nobody in sight, and he came back and stood in front of the girl, wringing his huge hands helplessly. It was a great question for a poor sailorman. If he went for the doctor he deserted his post ; if he didn't go his charge might die. He made one more attempt to awaken her, and, seizing a flower-glass, splashed her freely with cold water. She did not even wince.

‘It’s no use fooling with it,’ murmured Tucker ; ‘I must get the doctor, that’s all.’

He quitted the room, and, dashing hastily downstairs, had already opened the hall door when a thought struck him, and he came back again. Chrissie was still asleep in the chair, and, with a smile at the clever way in which he had solved a difficulty, he stooped down, and, raising her in his strong arms, bore her from the room and downstairs. Then a hitch occurred. The triumphant progress was marred by the behaviour of the hall door, which, despite his efforts, refused to be opened, and, encumbered by his fair burden, he could not for some time ascertain the reason. Then, full of shame that so much deceit could exist in so fair and frail a habitation, he discovered

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that Miss Polson's foot was pressing firmly against it. Her eyes were still closed and her head heavy, but the fact remained that one foot was acting in a manner that was full of intelligence and guile, and when he took it away from the door the other one took its place. By a sudden manœuvre the wily Tucker turned his back on the door, and opened it, and, at the same moment, a hand came to life again and dealt him a stinging slap on the face.

'Idiot !' said the indignant Chrissie, slipping from his arms and confronting him. 'How dare you take such a liberty ?'

The astonished boatswain felt his face, and regarded her open-mouthed.

'Don't you ever dare to speak to me again,' said the offended maiden, drawing herself up with irreproachable dignity. 'I am disgusted with your conduct. Most unbearable !'

'I was carrying you off to the doctor,' said the boatswain. 'How was I to know you was only shamming ?'

'*Shamming ?*' said Chrissie, in tones of incredulous horror. 'I was asleep. I often go to sleep in the afternoon.'

The boatswain made no reply, except to grin with great intelligence as he followed his charge upstairs again. He grinned at intervals until the return of Susan and Miss Polson, who,

trying to look unconcerned, came in later on, both apparently suffering from temper, Susan especially. Amid the sympathetic interruptions of these listeners Chrissie recounted her experiences, while the boatswain, despite his better sense, felt like the greatest scoundrel unhung, a feeling which was fostered by the remarks of Susan and the chilling regards of Miss Polson.

‘I shall inform the captain,’ said Miss Polson, bridling. ‘It’s my duty.’

‘Oh, I shall tell him,’ said Chrissie. ‘I shall tell him the moment he comes in at the door.’

‘So shall I,’ said Susan ; ‘the idea of taking such liberties !’

Having fired this broadside, the trio watched the enemy narrowly and anxiously.

‘If I’ve done anything wrong, ladies,’ said the unhappy boatswain, ‘I am sorry for it. I can’t say anything fairer than that, and I’ll tell the cap’n myself exactly how I came to do it when he comes in.’

‘Pah ! tell-tale !’ said Susan.

‘Of course, if you are here to fetch and carry,’ said Miss Polson, with withering emphasis.

‘The idea of a grown man telling tales,’ said Chrissie scornfully. ‘Baby !’

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‘Why, just now you were all going to tell him yourselves,’ said the bewildered boatswain.

The two elder women rose and regarded him with looks of pitying disdain. Miss Polson’s glance said ‘Fool!’ plainly; Susan, a simple child of nature, given to expressing her mind freely, said ‘Blockhead!’ with conviction.

‘I see ’ow it is,’ said the boatswain, after ruminating deeply. ‘Well, I won’t split, ladies. I can see now you was all in it, and it was a little job to get me out of the house.’

‘What a head he has got,’ said the irritated Susan; ‘isn’t it wonderful how he thinks of it all! Nobody would think he was so clever to look at him.’

‘Still waters run deep,’ said the boatswain, who was beginning to have a high opinion of himself.

‘And pride goes before a fall,’ said Chrissie; ‘remember that, Mr. Tucker.’

Mr. Tucker grinned, but, remembering the fable of the pitcher and the well, pressed his superior officer that evening to relieve him from his duties. He stated that the strain was slowly undermining a constitution which was not so strong as appearances would warrant, and that his knowledge of female nature was lamentably deficient on many important points.

‘ You’re doing very well,’ said the captain, who had no intention of attending any more Dorcases, ‘ very well indeed ; I am proud of you.’

‘ It isn’t a man’s work,’ objected the boatswain. ‘ Besides, if anything happens you’ll blame me for it.’

‘ Nothing can happen,’ declared the captain confidently. ‘ We shall make a start in about four days now. You’re the only man I can trust with such a difficult job, Tucker, and I shan’t forget you.’

‘ Very good,’ said the other dejectedly. ‘ I obey orders, then.’

The next day passed quietly, the members of the household making a great fuss of Tucker, and thereby filling him with forebodings of the worst possible nature. On the day after, when the captain, having business at a neighbouring town, left him in sole charge, his uneasiness could not be concealed.

‘ I’m going for a walk,’ said Chrissie, as he sat by himself, working out dangerous moves and the best means of checking them ; ‘ would you care to come with me, Tucker ? ’

‘ I wish you wouldn’t put it that way, miss,’ said the boatswain, as he reached for his hat.

‘ I want exercise,’ said Chrissie ; ‘ I’ve been cooped up long enough.’

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She set off at a good pace up the High Street, attended by her faithful follower, and passing through the small suburbs, struck out into the country beyond. After four miles the boatswain, who was no walker, reminded her that they had got to go back.

‘Plenty of time,’ said Chrissie, ‘we have got the day before us. Isn’t it glorious? Do you see that milestone, Tucker? I’ll race you to it; come along.’

She was off on the instant, with the boatswain, who suspected treachery, after her.

‘You *can* run,’ she panted, thoughtfully, as she came in second; ‘we’ll have another one presently. You don’t know how good it is for you, Tucker.’

The boatswain grinned sourly and looked at her from the corner of his eye. The next three miles passed like a horrible nightmare; his charge making a race for every milestone, in which the labouring boatswain, despite his want of practice, came in the winner. The fourth ended disastrously, Chrissie limping the last ten yards, and seating herself with a very woebegone face on the stone itself.

‘You did very well, miss,’ said the boatswain, who thought he could afford to be generous. ‘You needn’t be offended about it.’

‘It’s my ankle,’ said Chrissie with a little whimper. ‘Oh ! I twisted it right round.’

The boatswain stood regarding her in silent consternation.

‘It’s no use looking like that,’ said Chrissie sharply, ‘you great clumsy thing. If you hadn’t have run so hard it wouldn’t have happened. It’s all your fault.’

‘If you don’t mind leaning on me a bit,’ said Tucker, ‘we might get along.’

Chrissie took his arm petulantly, and they started on their return journey, at the rate of about four hours a mile, with little cries and gasps at every other yard.

‘It’s no use,’ said Chrissie as she relinquished his arm, and, limping to the side of the road, sat down. The boatswain pricked up his ears hopefully at the sound of approaching wheels.

‘What’s the matter with the young lady?’ inquired a groom who was driving a little trap, as he pulled up and regarded with interest a grimace of extraordinary intensity on the young lady’s face.

‘Broke her ankle, I think,’ said the boatswain glibly. ‘Which way are you going?’

‘Well, I’m going to Barborough,’ said the groom ; ‘but my guv’nor’s rather pertickler.’

‘I’ll make it all right with you,’ said the boatswain.

## THE BOATSWAIN'S WATCH

The groom hesitated a minute, and then made way for Chrissie as the boatswain assisted her to get up beside him ; then Tucker, with a grin of satisfaction at getting a seat once more, clambered up behind, and they started.

‘ Have a rug, mate,’ said the groom, handing the reins to Chrissie and passing it over ; ‘ put it round your knees and tuck the ends under you.’

‘ Aye, aye, mate,’ said the boatswain, as he obeyed the instructions.

‘ Are you sure you are quite comfortable ? ’ said the groom affectionately.

‘ Quite,’ said the other. *MS*

The groom said no more, but in a quiet, business-like fashion placed his hands on the seaman’s broad back, and shot him out into the road. Then he snatched up the reins and drove off at a gallop.

Without the faintest hope of winning, Mr. Tucker, who realized clearly, appearances notwithstanding, that he had fallen into a trap, rose after a hurried rest and started on his fifth race that morning. The prize was only a second-rate groom with plated buttons, who was waving cheery farewells to him with a dingy top-hat ; but the boatswain would have sooner had it than a silver tea-service.

He ran as he had never ran before in his life,

but all to no purpose, the trap stopping calmly a little farther on to take up another passenger, in whose favour the groom retired to the back seat ; then, with a final wave of the hand to him, they took a road to the left and drove rapidly out of sight. The boatswain's watch was over.

### VIII. SAM'S BOY

**I**T was getting late in the afternoon as Master Jones, in a somewhat famished condition, strolled up Aldgate with a keen eye on the gutter in search of anything that would serve him for his tea. Too late, he wished that he had saved some of the stale bread and damaged fruit which had constituted his dinner.

Aldgate proving barren, he turned up into the quieter Minories, skilfully dodging the mechanical cuff of the constable at the corner as he passed, and watching with some interest the efforts of a stray mongrel to get itself adopted. Its victim had sworn at it, cut at it with his stick, and even made little runs at it—all to no purpose. Finally, being a soft hearted man, he was weak enough to pat the cowering schemer on the head, and, being frantically licked by the homeless one, took it up in his arms and walked off with it.

Billy Jones watched the proceedings with interest, not untempered by envy. If he had only been a dog ! The dog passed in the man's arms, and, with a whine of ecstasy, insisted upon licking his ear. They went on their way,

the dog wondering between licks what sort of table the man kept, and the man speculating idly as to a descent which appeared to have included, among other things, an ant-eater.

‘ ’E’s all right,’ said the orphan wistfully ; ‘ no coppers to chivvy ’im about, and as much grub as he wants. Wish I’d been a dog.’

He tied up his breeches with a piece of string which was lying on the pavement, and, his hands being now free, placed them in a couple of rents which served as pockets, and began to whistle. He was not a proud boy, and was quite willing to take a lesson even from the humblest. Surely he was as useful as a dog !

The thought struck him just as a stout, kindly-looking seaman passed with a couple of shipmates. It was a good-natured face, and the figure was that of a man who lived well. A moment’s hesitation, and Master Jones, with a courage born of despair, ran after him and tugged him by the sleeve.

‘ Halloa ! ’ said Mr. Samuel Brown, looking round. ‘ What do you want ? ’

‘ Want you, father,’ said Master Jones.

The jolly seaman’s face broke into a smile. So also did the faces of the jolly seaman’s friends.

## SAM'S BOY

'I'm not your father, matey,' he said, good-naturedly.

'Yes, you are,' said the desperate Billy; 'you know you are.'

'You've made a mistake, my lad,' said Mr. Brown, still smiling. 'Here, run away.'

He felt in his trousers pocket and produced a penny. It was a gift, not a bribe, but it had by no means the effect its donor intended. Master Jones, now quite certain that he had made a wise choice of a father, trotted along a yard or two in the rear.

'Look here, my lad,' exclaimed Mr. Brown, goaded into action by intercepting a smile with which Mr. Charles Legge had favoured Mr. Harry Green, 'you run off home.'

'Where do you live now?' inquired Billy anxiously.

Mr. Green, disdaining concealment, slapped Mr. Legge on the back, and, laughing uproariously, regarded Master Jones with much kindness.

'You mustn't follow me,' said Sam severely; 'd'ye hear?'

'All right, father,' said the boy dutifully.

'And don't call me father,' vociferated Mr. Brown.

'Why not?' inquired the youth artlessly.

Mr. Legge stopped suddenly, and, putting

his hand on Mr. Green's shoulder, gaspingly expressed his inability to go any farther. Mr. Green, patting his back, said he knew how he felt, because he felt the same, and, turning to Sam, told him he'd be the death of him if he wasn't more careful.

'If you don't run away,' said Mr. Brown harshly, as he turned to the boy, 'I shall give you a hiding.'

'Where am I to run to?' whimpered Master Jones, dodging off and on.

'Run 'ome,' said Sam.

'That's where I'm going,' said Master Jones, following.

'Better try and give 'im the slip, Sam,' said Mr. Legge in a confidential whisper; 'though it seems a unnatural thing to do.'

'Unnatural? What d'ye mean?' demanded his unfortunate friend. 'Wot d'ye mean by unnatural?'

'Oh, if you're going to talk like that, Sam,' said Mr. Legge shortly, 'it's no good giving you advice. As you've made your bed, you must lay on it.'

'How long is it since you saw 'im last, matey?' inquired Mr. Green.

'I dunno; not very long,' replied the boy cautiously.

'Has he altered at all since you see 'im

last?' inquired the counsel for the defence, motioning the fermenting Mr. Brown to keep still.

'No,' said Billy firmly; 'not a bit.'

'Wot's your name?'

'Billy,' was the reply.

'Billy wot?'

'Billy Jones.'

Mr. Green's face cleared, and he turned to his friends with a smile of joyous triumph. Sam's face reflected his own, but Charlie Legge's was still overcast.

'It ain't likely,' he said impressively; 'it ain't likely as Sam would go and get married twice in the same name, is it? Put it to your self, 'Arry—would you?'

'Look 'ere,' exclaimed the infuriated Mr. Brown, 'don't you interfere in my business. You're a crocodile, that's wot you are. As for you, you little varmint, you run off. D'ye hear?'

He moved on swiftly, accompanied by the other two, and set an example of looking straight ahead of him, which was, however, lost upon his friends.

'E's still following of you, Sam,' said the crocodile in by no means disappointed tones.

'Sticking like a leech,' confirmed Mr. Green. 'E's a pretty little chap, rather.'

'Takes arter 'is mother,' said the vengeful Mr. Legge.

The unfortunate Sam said nothing, but strode a haunted man down Nightingale Lane into Wapping High Street, and so to the ketch *Nancy Bell*, which was lying at Shrimpett's Wharf. He stepped on board without a word, and only when he turned to descend the fore-castle-ladder did his gaze rest for a moment on the small, forlorn piece of humanity standing on the wharf.

'Halloa, boy, what do you want?' cried the skipper, catching sight of him.

'Want my father, sir—Sam,' replied the youth, who had kept his ears open.

The skipper got up from his seat and eyed him curiously; Messrs. Legge and Green, drawing near, explained the situation. Now the skipper was a worldly man; and Samuel Brown, A.B., when at home, played a brass instrument in the Salvation Army Band. He regarded the boy kindly and spoke him fair.

'Don't run away,' he said anxiously.

'I'm not going to, sir,' said Master Jones, charmed with his manner, and he watched breathlessly as the skipper stepped forward, and, peering down the fore-castle, called loudly for Sam.

## SAM'S BOY

'Yes, sir,' said a worried voice.

'Your boy's asking after you,' said the skipper, grinning madly.

'He's not my boy, sir,' replied Mr. Brown through his clenched teeth.

'Well, you'd better come up and see him,' said the other. 'Are you sure he isn't, Sam?'

Mr. Brown made no reply, but coming on deck met Master Jones's smile of greeting with an icy stare, and started convulsively as the skipper beckoned the boy aboard.

'He's been rather neglected, Sam,' said the skipper, shaking his head.

'Wot's it got to do with me?' said Sam violently. 'I tell you I've never seen 'im afore this arternoon.'

'You hear what your father says,' said the skipper. ('Hold your tongue, Sam.')

'Where's your mother, boy?'

'Dead, sir,' whined Master Jones. 'I've on'y got 'im now.'

The skipper was a kind-hearted man, and he looked pityingly at the forlorn little figure by his side. And Sam was the good man of the ship and a leading light at Dimport.

'How would you like to come to sea with your father?' he inquired.

The grin of delight with which Master Jones received this proposal was sufficient reply.

‘I wouldn’t do it for everybody,’ pursued the skipper, glancing severely at the mate, who was behaving foolishly, ‘but I don’t mind obliging you, Sam. He can come.’

‘*Obliging?*’ repeated Mr. Brown, hardly able to get the words out. ‘Obliging *me*? I don’t want to be obliged.’

‘There, there,’ interrupted the skipper. ‘I don’t want any thanks. Take him forrard and give him something to eat—he looks half starved, poor little chap.’

He turned away and went down to the cabin, while the cook, whom Mr. Brown had publicly rebuked for his sins the day before, led the boy to the galley and gave him a good meal. After that was done Charlie washed him, and Harry, going ashore, begged a much-worn suit of boy’s clothes from a foreman of his acquaintance. He also brought back a message from the foreman to Mr. Brown to the effect that he was surprised at him.

The conversation that evening after Master Jones was asleep turned upon bigamy, but Mr. Brown snored through it all, though Mr. Legge’s remark that the revelations of that afternoon had thrown a light upon many little things in his behaviour which had hitherto baffled him, came perilously near to awaking him.

## SAM'S BOY

At six in the morning they got under way, the boy going nearly frantic with delight as sail after sail was set, and the ketch, with a stiff breeze, rapidly left London behind her. Mr. Brown studiously ignored him, but the other men pampered him to his heart's content, and even the cabin was good enough to manifest a little concern in his welfare, the skipper calling Mr. Brown up no fewer than five times that day to complain about his son's behaviour.

'I can't have somersaults on this 'ere ship, Sam,' he remarked, shaking his head; 'it ain't the place for 'em.'

'I wonder at you teaching 'im such things,' said the mate, in grave disapprobation.

'Me?' said the hapless Sam, trembling with passion.

'He must 'ave seen you do it,' said the mate, letting his eye rove casually over Sam's ample proportions. 'You must ha' been leading a double life altogether, Sam.'

'That's nothing to do with us,' interrupted the skipper impatiently. 'I don't mind Sam turning cart-wheels all day if it amuses him, but they mustn't do it here, that's all. It's no good standing there sulking, Sam; I can't have it.'

He turned away, and Mr. Brown, unable to

decide whether he was mad or drunk, or both, walked back, and, squeezing himself up in the bows, looked miserably over the sea. Behind him the men disported themselves with Master Jones, and once, looking over his shoulder, he actually saw the skipper giving him a lesson in steering.

By the following afternoon Mr. Brown was in such a state of collapse that, when they put in at the small port of Withersea to discharge a portion of their cargo, he obtained permission to stay below in his bunk. Work proceeded without him, and at nine o'clock in the evening they sailed again, and it was not until they were a couple of miles on their way to Dimport that Mr. Legge rushed aft with the announcement that he was missing.

'Don't talk nonsense,' said the skipper, as he came up from below in response to a hail from the mate.

'It's a fact, sir,' said Mr. Legge, shaking his head.

'What's to be done with the boy?' demanded the mate blankly.

'Sam's an unsteady, unreliable, tricky old man,' exclaimed the skipper hotly; 'the idea of going and leaving a boy on our hands like that. I'm surprised at him. I'm disappointed in Sam—deserting!'

'I expect 'e's larfing like anything, sir,' remarked Mr. Legge.

'Get forrard,' said the skipper sharply ; 'get forrard at once. D'ye hear ?'

'But what's to be done with the boy ?—that's what I want to know,' said the mate.

'What d'ye think's to be done with him ?' bawled the skipper. 'We can't chuck him overboard, can we ?'

'I mean when we get to Dimport ?' growled the mate.

'Well, the men'll talk,' said the skipper, calming down a little, 'and perhaps Sam's wife'll come and take him. If not, I suppose he'll have to go to the workhouse. Anyway, it's got nothing to do with me. I wash my hands of it altogether.'

He went below again, leaving the mate at the wheel. A murmur of voices came from the forecastle, where the crew were discussing the behaviour of their late colleague. The bereaved Master Jones, whose face was streaky with the tears of disappointment, looked on from his bunk.

'What are you going to do, Billy ?' inquired the cook.

'I dunno,' said the boy miserably.

He sat up in his bunk in a brown study, ever and anon turning his sharp little eyes from

one to another of the men. Then, with a final sniff to the memory of his departed parent, he composed himself to sleep.

With the buoyancy of childhood he had forgotten his trouble by the morning, and ran idly about the ship as before, until in the afternoon they came in sight of Dimport. Mr. Legge, who had a considerable respect for the brain hidden in that small head, pointed it out to him, and with some curiosity waited for his remarks.

‘I can see it,’ said Master Jones briefly.

‘That’s where Sam lives,’ said his friend pointedly.

‘Yes,’ said the boy, nodding, ‘all of you live there, don’t you?’

It was an innocent enough remark in all conscience, but there was that in Master Jones’s eye which caused Mr. Legge to move away hastily and glance at him in some disquietude from the other side of the deck. The boy, unconscious of the interest excited by his movements, walked restlessly up and down.

‘Boy’s worried,’ said the skipper, aside, to the mate; ‘cheer up, sonny.’

Billy looked up and smiled, and the cloud which had sat on his brow when he thought of the cold-blooded desertion of Mr. Brown gave way to an expression of serene content.

' Well, what's he going to do ? ' inquired the mate in a low voice.

' That needn't worry us,' said the skipper. ' Let things take their own course ; that's my motto.'

He took the wheel from Harry ; the little town came closer ; the houses separated and disclosed roads, and the boy discovered to his disappointment that the church stood on ground of its own, and not on the roof of a large red house as he had supposed. He ran forward as they got closer, and, perching up in the bows until they were fast to the quay, looked round searchingly for any signs of Sam.

The skipper locked up the cabin, and then calling on one of the shore-hands to keep an eye on the forecastle, left it open for the convenience of the small passenger. Harry, Charlie, and the cook stepped ashore. The skipper and mate followed, and the latter, looking back from some distance, called his attention to the desolate little figure sitting on the hatch.

' I s'pose he'll be all right,' said the skipper uneasily ; ' there's food and a bed down in the fo'c's'le. You might just look round to-night and see he's safe. I expect we'll have to take him back to London with us.'

They turned up a small road in the direction of home and walked on in silence, until the

mate, glancing behind at an acquaintance who had just passed, uttered a sharp exclamation. The skipper turned, and a small figure which had just shot round the corner stopped in mid-career and eyed them warily. The men exchanged uneasy glances.

‘Father,’ cried a small voice.

‘He—he’s adopted you now,’ said the skipper huskily.

‘Or you,’ said the mate. ‘I never took much notice of him.’

He looked round again. Master Jones was following briskly, about ten yards in the rear, and twenty yards behind him came the crew, who, having seen him quit the ship, had followed with the evident intention of being in at the death.

‘Father,’ cried the boy again, ‘wait for me.’

One or two passers by stared in astonishment, and the mate began to be uneasy as to the company he was keeping.

‘Let’s separate,’ he growled, ‘and see who he’s calling after.’

The skipper caught him by the arm. ‘Shout out to him to go back,’ he cried.

‘It’s you he’s after, I tell you,’ said the mate. ‘Who do you want, Billy?’

‘I want my father,’ cried the youth, and, to

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prevent any mistake, indicated the raging skipper with his finger.

'*Who* do you want?' bellowed the latter in a frightful voice.

'Want you, father,' chirruped Master Jones.

Wrath and dismay struggled for supremacy in the skipper's face, and he paused to decide whether it would be better to wipe Master Jones off the face of the earth or to pursue his way in all the strength of conscious innocence. He chose the latter course, and, a shade more erect than usual, walked on until he came in sight of his house and his wife, who was standing at the door.

'You come along o' me, Jem, and explain,' he whispered to the mate. Then he turned about and hailed the crew. The crew, flattered at being offered front seats in the affair, came forward eagerly.

'What's the matter?' inquired Mrs. Hunt, eyeing the crowd in amazement as it grouped itself in anticipation.

'Nothing,' said her husband off-handedly.

'Who's that boy?' cried the innocent woman.

'It's a poor little mad boy,' began the skipper; 'he came aboard——'

'I'm not mad, father,' interrupted Master Jones.

‘A poor little mad boy,’ continued the skipper hastily, ‘who came aboard in London and said poor old Sam Brown was his father.’

‘No—you, father,’ cried the boy shrilly.

‘He calls everybody his father,’ said the skipper, with a smile of anguish ; ‘that’s the form his madness takes. He called Jem here his father.’

‘No, he didn’t,’ said the mate bluntly.

‘And then he thought Charlie was his father.’

‘No, sir,’ said Mr. Legge with respectful firmness.

‘Well, he said Sam Brown was,’ said the skipper.

‘Yes, that’s right, sir,’ said the crew.

‘Where is Sam?’ inquired Mrs. Hunt, looking round expectantly.

‘He deserted the ship at Withersea,’ said her husband.

‘I see,’ said Mrs. Hunt with a bitter smile, ‘and these men have all come up prepared to swear that the boy said Sam was his father. Haven’t you?’

‘Yes, mum,’ chorused the crew, delighted at being understood so easily.

Mrs. Hunt looked across the road to the fields stretching beyond. Then she suddenly brought her gaze back, and, looking full at her husband, uttered just two words :

'Oh, Joe!'

'Ask the mate,' cried the frantic skipper.

'Yes, I know what the mate'll say,' said Mrs. Hunt. 'I've no need to ask him.'

'Charlie and Harry were with Sam when the boy came up to them,' protested the skipper.

'I've no doubt,' said his wife. 'Oh, Joe! Joe! Joe!'

There was an uncomfortable silence, during which the crew, standing for the most part on one leg in sympathy with their chief's embarrassment, nudged each other to say something to clear the character of a man whom all esteemed.

'You ungrateful little devil,' burst out Mr. Legge, at length; 'arter the kind way the skipper treated you, too.'

'Did he treat him kindly?' inquired the captain's wife, in conversational tones.

'Like a fa—like a uncle, mum,' said the thoughtless Mr. Legge. 'Gave 'im a passage on the ship and fairly spoilt 'im. We was all surprised at the fuss 'e made of 'im; wasn't we, Harry?'

He turned to his friend, but on Mr. Green's face there was an expression of such utter scorn and contempt that his own fell. He glanced at the skipper, and was almost frightened at his appearance.

The situation was ended by Mrs. Hunt entering the house and closing the door with an ominous bang. The men slunk off, headed by Mr. Legge ; and the mate, after a few murmured words of encouragement to the skipper, also departed. Captain Hunt looked first at the small cause of his trouble, who had drawn off to some distance, and then at the house. Then, with a determined gesture, he turned the handle of the door and walked in. His wife, who was sitting in an arm-chair, with her eyes on the floor, remained motionless.

‘ Look here, Polly——’ he began.

‘ Don’t talk to me,’ was the reply. ‘ I wonder you can look me in the face.’

The skipper ground his teeth, and strove to maintain an air of judicial calm.

‘ If you’ll only be reasonable——’ he remarked severely.

‘ I thought there was something secret going on,’ said Mrs. Hunt. ‘ I’ve often looked at you when you’ve been sitting in that chair with a worried look on your face, and wondered what it was. But I never thought it was so bad as this. I’ll do you the credit to say that I never thought of such a thing as this. . . . What did you say ? . . . What ? ’

‘ I said “ damn ! ” ’ said the skipper explosively.

‘Yes, I’ve no doubt,’ said his wife fiercely. ‘You think you’re going to carry it off with a high hand and bluster; but you won’t bluster me, my man. I’m not one of your meek and mild women who’ll put up with anything. I’m not one of your——’

‘I tell you,’ said the skipper, ‘that the boy calls everybody his father. I dare say he’s claimed another by this time.’

Even as he spoke the handle turned, and the door opening a few inches disclosed the anxious face of Master Jones. Mrs. Hunt, catching the skipper’s eye, pointed to it in an ecstasy of silent wrath. There was a breathless pause, broken at last by the boy.

‘Mother!’ he said softly.

Mrs. Hunt stiffened in her chair and her arms fell by her side as she gazed in speechless amazement. Master Jones, opening the door a little wider, gently insinuated his small figure into the room. The skipper gave one glance at his wife, and then, turning hastily away, put his hand over his mouth, and, with protruding eyes, gazed out of the window.

‘Mother, can I come in?’ said the boy.

‘Oh, Polly!’ sighed the skipper.

Mrs. Hunt strove to regain the utterance of which astonishment had deprived her.

‘ I . . . what . . . Joe . . . don’t be a fool ! ’

‘ Yes, I’ve no doubt,’ said the skipper theatrically. ‘ Oh, Polly ! Polly ! Polly ! ’

He put his hand over his mouth again and laughed silently, until his wife, coming behind him, took him by the shoulders and shook him violently.

‘ This,’ said the skipper, choking—‘ this is what . . . you’ve been worrying about. . . . This is the secret what’s——’

He broke off suddenly as his wife thrust him by main force into a chair, and standing over him with a fiery face dared him to say another word. Then she turned to the boy.

‘ What do you mean by calling me “mother” ? ’ she demanded. ‘ I’m not your mother.’

‘ Yes, you are,’ said Master Jones.

Mrs. Hunt eyed him in bewilderment, and then, roused to a sense of her position by a renewed gurgling from the skipper’s chair, set to work to try and thump that misguided man into a more serious frame of mind. Failing in this, she sat down, and after a futile struggle, began to laugh herself, and that so heartily that Master Jones, smiling sympathetically, closed the door and came boldly into the room.

The statement, generally believed, that Captain Hunt and his wife adopted him, is

## SAM'S BOY

incorrect, the skipper accounting for his continued presence in the house by the simple explanation that he had adopted them—an explanation which Mr. Samuel Brown, for one, finds quite easy of acceptance.

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